RIS3 - The road users' perspective on the draft strategic objectives for the Strategic Road Network

Briefing Report May 2021

Contents

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Introduction

Background and objectives

Every 5 years the Department for Transport (DfT) sets out in a Road Investment Strategy (RIS) its key priorities and objectives for Highways England as custodian of England's motorways and major 'A' roads – the Strategic Road Network (SRN).

Transport Focus and DfT have worked together to sense check the extent to which the Department's draft strategic objectives for RIS3, covering 2025-30, align with what road users see as important.

BVA BDRC were appointed by Transport Focus to lead a qualitative study the goals are which are set out below.

The overarching goal of the research is:

- To understand how well the objective outlined in the draft strategy document are understood and whether they resonate with road users

- To understand whether the draft objectives align with what road users feel are the most important priorities for improvement in the Strategic Road Network

- To identify whether there are any gaps in the strategy, and what is missing that road users feel is important

- To guide the DfT in their confidence that the draft strategy meets the road users' needs

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Methodological approach and fieldwork

SRN users by region and disabled SRN users

We developed a three day programme for each respondent with around 30 minutes of activities for the first two days, with a homework task in between which consisted of a summary of the draft document and a 90 minute live discussion (or 30 minute depth for the disabled respondents and any additional respondents) for a third day. The live discussion took place following an opportunity for the respondents to travel on the SRN. For the first two days we used our Recollective platform* for respondents to record their responses; for the live discussion we used Zoom.

The 2 day activity guide on Recollective focused on the following areas:

Day 1

- About the road user, their use of the roads and impact of the pandemic
- The benefits, the problems and the priorities for the SRN

Day 2

- Thoughts on the draft document they read for the homework task
- Thoughts on each of the 6 objectives and their main priority

Day 3

- Live discussion with focus on what respondents feel is the most important area of the draft document; what should be prioritised (if anything) above another objective; and a focus on this from a regional perspective.

*The Recollective platform is a online ethnographic tool which takes participants through a variety of activities to attain rich qualitative output and prime respondents before a group discussion.

Fleet managers

Similar to the SRN users by region, fleet managers were tasked with a day on Recollective and a 90 minute live discussion. The fleet managers were not shown Day 1, but rather given the homework task and then Day 2 where their opinions on the objectives were asked from the perspective of benefits to their business.

Fieldwork dates

Fieldwork took place from 20th April to 29th April 2021, with the live discussion and depths taking place between the 26th April to the 29th April 2021.

	South West	South East	North West	North East	West Midlands	East Midlands	East	Fleet managers	Depths (incl. disabled)
Car user – leisure	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	3
Car user – work	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
Van drivers	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
Lorry drivers	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
Motorcycle users	1	1	1	1	1••	1••	1	-	-
Pedestrians	-		1	-	1••	1	-	-	-
Horse riders	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Cyclists	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
Total	5	7	6	7	6	6	6	6	4

Total of 53 respondents.

*Unable to make groups so conducted as depth
**These respondents completed Day 1 of Recollective only.

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Overall findings

A POSITIVE initial response to RIS3 objectives and themes

The objectives and themes of the draft documentation of RIS3 were seen as ambitious but incorporating the priorities of road users and fleet managers. For many personal road users it opened up broader areas of consideration about the network they drive on.

> *"The document was very informative but a bit extreme in terms of they are expecting a lot to be done in what I feel is a short space of time."* **Van driver, South East**

> *"to be honest , there is a lot to take on board in the documentation"* **Motorcyclist, North West**

> *"I think as a whole the document tackles all the necessary subjects relevant in today's society. Some may be more interested in some more than others, for example the environment over the economy but I think overall the document is well balanced. "* **Car user for leisure, North East**

> *I thought it was a carefully prepared very relevant document and they are focusing on all the right issues. The network performance most relates to our business as we lose a lot of man hours due to traffic and roadworks issues. Nothing did not relate and I think all these issues are important. I think setting out the issues worked well with the areas being considered for improvement really useful in helping the reader understand the issue. It all worked well together for me and there's nothing I would consider leaving out.* **Fleet manager**

Considered priority objectives for RIS3

Road users identified all objectives as important priorities, recognising the overlap between them all. As a result of this inter-relationship many would choose three or four priority objectives; and all six objectives were at some time prioritised as to where the emphasis of RIS3 should lean.

> *"Safety & environmental concerns are underpinned by planning for the future & through utilising new technologies for best practice."* **Car user for work, East Midlands**

Opinions are nuanced. It wasn't the case that lorry and van drivers would always prioritise one objective, car users another, motorcyclists another, pedestrians, cyclists, horse-riders, the disabled another. All road users had particular issues with the SRN in their region. Consequently, there were relatable examples around which each regional group could convene.

Interpreting feedback from across the seven regional focus groups and disabled depths, there emerged three priority tiers which can provide the Department for Transport with supporting evidence to help decide on the trade off of some priorities over others. *(see next slide)*

Fleet managers delivered a slightly different perspective to personal road users and have therefore been addressed separately later in the report.

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Personal road users' priority focus for RIS3

Tier one

Managing & planning for future

Network performance

Tier two

Safety

Environment

Tier three

Technology

Growing the economy

- ***Tier one*: *Managing and planning for the future & Network performance***

These two objectives, particularly the themes of delivering the right level of maintenance and renewals and avoiding delays are the areas where it is felt that Highways England can exert the most influence. Getting them both right has positive knock-on effects across the other objectives.

- ***Tier two: Improving safety for all & Improved environmental outcomes***

Many respondents prioritised safety above everything else but the majority recognised a major factor - improving driver behaviour - was a wider challenge for society and felt that by prioritising the two tier one objectives, many of the causes of accidents on the roads would be reduced. Everyone recognized the changing world we are living in and the need to focus on improve environmental outcomes. Most felt that facilitating the constant steady flow of traffic on the SRN would be the greatest contribution the road network could give to furthering these ambitions. There was more support for an emphasis on improved environmental outcomes than there was on growing the economy.

- ***Tier three*: *A technology enabled / enabling network & Growing the economy***

These were the two most divisive subject areas. Some saw a focus on technology as the solution to everything, with knock-on benefits to improved environmental outcomes and safety in-particular. However, some were unconvinced, whether about the pace of change or the ability of those responsible to get the technology right to adapt to those changes. With respects to growing the economy, many felt that whilst it was important it wasn't an outcome that the road network had exclusive influence over and should not be prioritised over other objectives. However, given Covid, a small minority felt compelled to prioritise efforts to grow the economy above anything else.

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Support for Tier one priorities

Network Performance

"I think it should be a blend of Network Performance and a Technology enabled network. People notice a lot when their journey is delayed, but might not notice much about some of the other aspects of the RIS. In a post-COVID world when people begin to travel more and we see large numbers of road users, there is higher potential for congestion and traffic. Therefore there should be more of a focus on the performance side as well as increasing capacity. With regards to the technology-side, starting to look at how new driving technologies will impact on the existing road network is important. **Car user for leisure, West Midlands**

"I feel that the greatest focus should be on network performance. I think that is where the impact will be felt the most and needs to be centrally co-ordinated and invested in. If the performance isn't there, then roads grind to a halt. With the other priorities, there are things that other organisations/individuals can do to contribute. Keeping roads moving are of immediate importance, along with offering alternatives. " **Car user for leisure, East**

"Network performance is key to some of the other answers in my view, flowing traffic keeps co2 down, speeds up freight and helps the economy" **Lorry driver, South West**

"Consistently and clearly Network performance. Decisions need to be efficiency driven . Get the efficiency and the safety and environmental all improve." **Van driver, West Midlands**

"I think that the focus of the investment strategy has to be network performance . Having a robust road network will in turn lead to being able to focus on the other areas, like adapting to technology etc. But there is a lot that could be improved now, before looking to the future." **Disabled**

Managing & planning for the future

"Managing and planning the SRN for the future. Failure to do this will cost the government far more than if they had planned appropriately." **Lorry Driver, East Midlands**

"My emphasis would be to repair and restore the existing road network to make it function to full capacity. If the roads are functioning efficiently than I would hope that safety also improves - impatience and frustration are clearly the trigger for some bad driving and even some of the road rage incidents . At that point thoughts can turn towards planning for the future. Environmental issues are also important and should be automatically factored into future plans." **Motorcyclist, South East**

"Managing and planning for the srn of the future would be my choice. I think the systems need replacing as they don't always serve their purpose now with the volume of traffic on the roads. We need better designed roads, fit for purpose, properly monitored, with alternative routes should there be accidents" **Pedestrian, East Midlands.**

Managing and planning the SRN for the future. I believe if this is done correctly and effectively with consideration of what is required then it will consider all the other objectives anyway. Safety, performance, new technology, the environment and the economy will all be considered as part of the bigger picture. **Car user for leisure, North East**

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Support for Tier two priorities

Safety

"Safety for all is fundamental and should always be the thing you consider most when implementing anything." **Lorry driver, North East**

Improving safety for all, safety for drivers, those living near roads and those working on roads, reducing suicides and deaths on the road has to be the most important factor - humans are everything in this world and protecting them must come first, **Van driver, North East**

Road awareness and safety, changing behaviours, make informed decisions and provide rationale, not only considering the environmental impact but actually taking every opportunity possible to mitigate any damage, holding contractors accountable, not changing strategies on the whim of the govt./stakeholders/investors, talk (and listen!!!) to scientists... and actually go out and do good things. Stop talking about it and go and do it! **Motorcyclist, South West**

Reason for Tier 2 level
"My perspective is very simple: Have a road infrastructure network which is fully maintained, thereby ensuring safety for travel." **Car user for leisure, North West**

"For me the biggest factors are improving safety, growing the economy and reducing carbon emissions. Priority number one has to be making the roads a safer place for everyone. It also needs to be made more accessible for those with disabilities. By reducing congestion and introducing low emissions cars, this will help improve the environmental issues we are currently facing from the roads which is becoming a problem that is getting out of control." **Car user for leisure, Disabled**

Environment

Improved Environmental Outcomes. There's no point in having the best road network in the world when we no longer have a world. **Motorcyclist, North East**

"Environmental outcomes - changes to support this are long term thing and cannot happen overnight. This is something that needs to be dealt with now" **Lorry driver, East**

"My main concern is for the environment, the impact any new road structure will have on the natural habitat and wildlife. We are only an island and the more we cover it in concrete and asphalt the worse it will be for this green and pleasant land" **Van driver, South West**

Reason for Tier 2 level

"Although the environment is important, this isn't as important to me personally. I think that if you have a low emission car, the impact on the environment is minimal. There is still a lot of work to be done on electric cars. I know people who have them and are fed up with the shortage of mileage that you get out of them" **Car user for work, North West**

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Support and concern for Tier 3 priorities
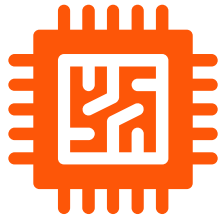
Technology

"I think a technology enabled and enabling network is something that can be tackled in such a way that it can bring a synergy effect to the remaining areas. Application of tech means we can better monitor the roads and manage them in such a way to improve environmental outcome, ensure safety, grow the economy through better road management and network performance. Tech has so many benefits that can be brought to other areas but these other areas would not be able to deliver as much without the help of tech" **Car user for leisure, Disabled**

Reason for Tier 3 level

"I worry that an early emphasis on enabling connected vehicle technology will actually create a similar situation to the UK Canal network - canal technology was adopted very early when it was immature and pulled by horses. As soon as the steam engine was invented and barges could be made bigger then the existing canal network proved too small and was rapidly abandoned to rail transport . I can see a situation whereby emerging technologies are installed in a rush and we end up with systems that don't function effectively or even don't work with the most modern vehicles." **Motorcyclist, South East**

Growing the economy

I think with COVID-19 growing the economy is the only option I could pick, to build our country back up and out of debt, **Cyclist, North East**

"Given the last year / 18 months growing the economy will be vital and If this will help in the both the short / long term then its a no brainer." **Van driver, East**

Reason for Tier 3 level

"For me, safety and the environment are more important areas to focus on than the economy." **Van driver, South East**

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Priorities within the six strategic objectives

Strategic objective: Network performance

Priority themes within the objective

1. Avoiding delay
2. Integrated network
3. Connecting the nation

> *"The purpose of my journey is to get from A to B, the quickest journey in the safest way. Once the journey is complete by road, to jump on a train/hub nearby would be stressful. The nation is already connected with more than ample roads to get to your destination."*

Car user for leisure, North West

> *"Avoiding delay is most important, nobody wants to be stuck in traffic, if there was a way of me knowing exactly where the delays were I would avoid, there's nothing worse than starting the journey then being unable to get to your destination on time because of a major delay that you didn't know about."*

Pedestrian, East Midlands

Rationale

Network performance is seen as crucial to road users as a better performing network means an easier journey overall.

The general consensus is that avoiding delay is the priority within this objective, with delays being the main reason for annoyance when travelling on the network. A big part of this is the provision of information which is undoubtedly the biggest cause of delays in their opinion. Road users would like to see more information: either using current technology on the digital boards on the network, or through linking with technology into phones or cars at earlier points in their journey so they can make better decisions when driving. As a by-product, many feel this will subsequently improve driver behaviour and safety will be improved.

Integrating the network is seen as more important than connecting the nation, as public transport links are not always an option or are, at present, a slower alternative. This will be important in the future with the likes of new transport networks, such as HS2.

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Variations and differences

Midlands

Integrating the network and connecting the nation seem to be taking a priority within the Midlands given the forthcoming HS2 network and Commonwealth Games in 2022. For this it is imperative that the network is linked with other transport networks and particularly to airports for international travellers.

"

"They are in the middle of modernising the A45 until spring 2022, it is probably linked and in line with the commonwealth games next year. They are putting in bus lanes and cycle lanes …and hopeful it will improve the roads in future"

Car user for leisure, West Midlands

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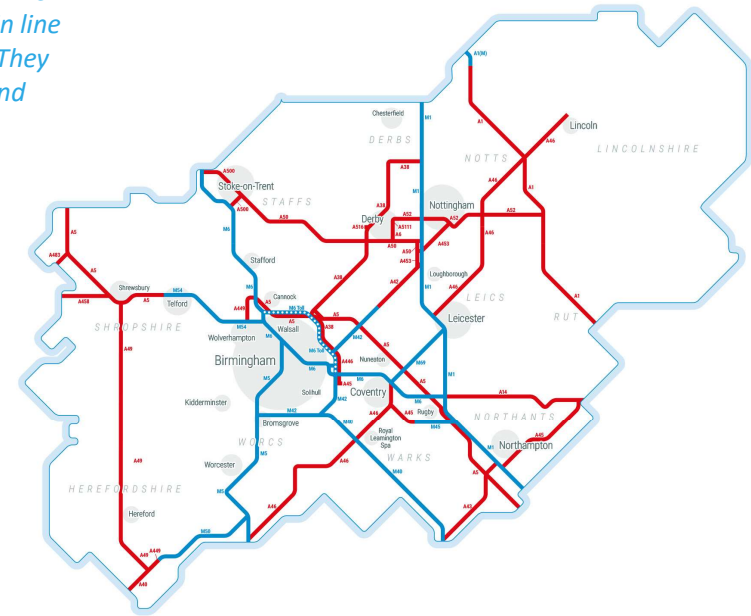
"HS2 a big deal so an integrated network will still be important in the future. And it is important for us in the West midlands it will be a quick and easy connection into London, so this brings around the levelling up factor."

Car user for work, West Midlands

Strategic objective: Planning for the future

Priority themes within the objective

1. Delivering the right level of maintenance and renewals
1. Building a resilient infrastructure network
2. Achieving efficiencies
3. Climate change adaptation

Rationale

Among the groups each of these are considered important, interlinked and the driver behind a lot of other RIS3 objectives. Maintenance of the roads to a high standard is imperative in the minds of road users as it minimises the work needed in the future and in turn will help build a resilient infrastructure network. Building this network is important for planning ahead and ensuring that the network keeps operating, as without this it could impact the network performance and the economic value of the road network.

Achieving efficiencies will support the above and help maintain continued development, while climate change adaptation was considered as a vital part of the network going forward.

"If we have to improve our road network then all four objectives should really be rolled into one because they are, fundamentally, interdependent."

Motorcyclist, North East

"Building a resilient infrastructure network - This is the most important as if this fails to be implemented there could be potential serious breakdown of the network causing many disruptions and impact to the economy."

Lorry driver, East

"A resilient infrastructure will support the other aspects - less carbon emissions as traffic will be able to move steadily; not at a standstill; links between towns/cities will be widespread and enable traffic to be dispersed and not limited to a few key areas; resilience means less work and disruption, therefore less standstills and less maintenance fumes. Thus environmentally better; achieving greater efficiencies and delivering less need for maintenance."

Car user for leisure, North East

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Strategic objective: Improving safety for all

Priority themes within the objective

1. Driver behaviour
2. Improving infrastructure towards 2040 zero harm mission
2. Understanding the role of new tech
3. Perception of safety
4. Road worker safety

> **"I end up in more unsafe situations due to other driver's behaviour."**

Car user for work, North West

> **"It's all about communication and understanding what you ask people to do. It needs to be more impactful, such as via some shock statistics."**

Car user for leisure, South West

Rationale

Driver behaviour is by far the most important theme within the safety objective as road users feel that safety problems all stem from here. It is making people more aware of their driving behaviour, which many considered to be poor in their area. Communication and education are ways in which people feel this could be improved, and so improving the road infrastructure through more signage, as well as utilising new technology to support safety were considered. The perception of safety and road worker safety are important, but less so than the other themes, as road users feel this is less 'relatable' to their situation and thus less of a priority.

> **"It's the reckless driving, speeding and tailgating that is a concern to me and education needs to be given 'here."**

Car user for leisure, Disabled

> **"Speed a big issue - stop people speeding is the most important thing out there.."**

Van driver, East

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Variations and differences

Horse-riders and cyclists

Safety is more important among these groups as they are not provided with the same protection as other modes of transport. A segregated pathway or reduced speed limits of roads could be one way of helping these groups feel safer while travelling along, beside or across the SRN. However the majority of horse-riders and cyclists would prefer not to use the SRN for this purpose and as car users they have similar preferences to other road users.

"I would like to see a segregated pathway for horse riders, a bit like cycle lanes, as this will make me feel more secluded and a little safer when having to use the roads."

Horse-rider, South West

"Cyclists are dangerous on the A3, seen so many accidents, with heavy volumes of traffic this is dangerous and needs to be addressed."

Car user for leisure, South East

"On the A11 there are issues with cycling safety. The lorries come very close and it's very off putting. I would like to see reduced speed limits, or maybe an average speed limit and more cameras...but what is most important is maintenance and getting the A11 sorted"

Cyclist, East

HGV drivers

HGV drivers spoke about the CPC test they take every 5 years to prove they were competent, and this gave them training not only on driving HGVs but to go out on other modes of transport, such a bicycle. This meant they were a lot more aware of driver behaviour and felt that education could be key for improving driver behaviour.

"As a lorry driver they have regular training and one kind is that they put you on bicycles so you get a better \understanding of what it's like for them...Like with everything in life, the more you know about other things, the better you understand. Maybe that is something that needs to be done for drivers."

Lorry driver, South West

Disabled users

Two of the three disabled respondents mentioned needing more provision for being able to safely stop. Their conditions and others they are aware of may mean they need to stop every 10 miles or so for a break, and the infrequent options to safely do this can make driving all the more stressful.

"Would like there to be more places to pull over for drivers with disabilities who need to stop every 10 miles or so to take a break."

Car user for leisure, Disabled

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Strategic objective: Improving environmental outcomes

Priority themes within the objective

1. Reducing road user carbon emissions

2. Improving the health and wellbeing for those living next to, working on or using the road network

3. Improving the natural, built and historic environment

"The maintenance of the roads is linked to environmental issues. If the roads and transport links can be improved, it will be better for the environment as more people will look at alternative methods of transport. If the conditions of the roads are improved, there would be less stopping and starting and this too would benefit the environment."

Car user for work, North West

"The priority is reducing exhaust emissions and encouraging the use of electric vehicles and improving the rapid-charging infrastructure. Not everyone is in a position to move to electric vehicles, so provision for older vehicles must be maintained.

Car user for leisure, South West

Rationale

The environmental objective is viewed by road users as an immediate objective given the wider knowledge of climate change and the move towards renewable resources. Overall, reducing road user carbon emissions is considered the priority. Many feel this could be done through better maintained roads, and wider roads, particularly in the North, to help remove congestion and subsequent pollution, and better infrastructure for electric vehicles. It is viewed as the most achievable objective, particularly through the use of legislation. The other two themes are of importance though are likely to be largely improved by reducing emissions.

Anything that is overlooked?

One area that road users felt could have a greater focus is the idea of wildlife corridors. One example was to have wildlife areas, either elevated above the ground via bridges or have roads through tunnels, to preserve the natural wildlife environment.

"I like the idea of bridges and tunnels being built so that wildlife can safely cross underneath these roads and motorways."
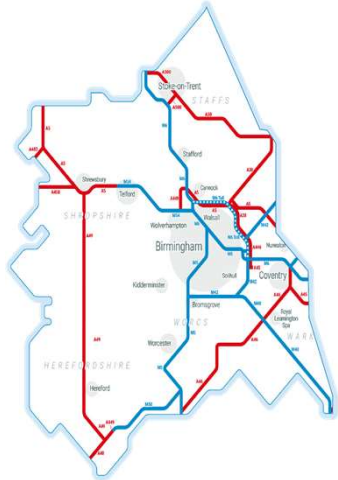
Horse-rider, South East

"As a nation we have lost substantial populations of bird, insect and animal life in living memory.

Van driver, South West

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Variations and differences

West Midlands

Road users in the West Midlands prioritised other aspects of improving the SRN above improving environmental outcomes. This was partly because they found it difficult to see how Highways England could improve the environment, given their very nature of building roads to accommodate polluting vehicles.

"This section is very difficult, by its nature the road network is polluting the environment and I think this is a difficult thing to do for a government agency to do – a drop in the ocean."

"This is the lowest down my list as I read about how the much larger nations who are impacting the 2050 targets by doing very little and we are small in relation to the global impact table."

"Reducing the carbon emission is a big thing but sometimes it seems they make you do more miles than you need to. Because you can't turn or you have to go all the way around a roundabout and back to be able to turn."

"It has to be done in a sustainable way. E.g. not having traffic lights that let 5 cars through and others sit there idling. E.g. public transport currently takes too long and is too expensive."

South West

Road users in the South West advocated improving environmental outcomes but felt like the current road infrastructure and network layout was not practical. They felt the priority was on utilising the roads we have, rather than building new ones, and making these more efficient and this will in turn help to minimise carbon emissions.

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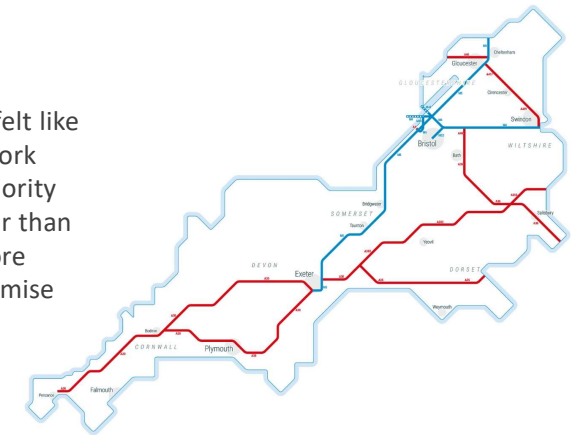
Strategic objective: A technology enabled/enabling network

Priority themes within the objective

1. Ensuring the network is ready for the next generation of vehicles, including Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CAVs), i.e. cars that can drive themselves, as well as zero-carbon vehicle rollout

2. Exploring wider benefits/dis-benefits of new tech to consumers

3. A better understanding of user trust in new technology

3. The linking with organisations managing other road networks

4. Monitoring performance of new roads, and how operation of the network adapts to new technology

> *"The world is moving towards electronic cars and cars that drive automatically, ensuring the roads are ready for these is the most important as without being ready they won't launch or be a success."*

Van driver, North East

> *"The road users need to understand the new tech involved before any further things can be done."*
> **Cyclist, South East**

Rationale

A technology enabled network is seen as feeding into the other objectives, e.g. zero-carbon vehicles will improve environmental outcomes and new tech could improve the provision of information to reduce communication issues. As a standalone objective, ensuring the network is ready for the next generation of vehicles is most important as these are the future and inevitably the roads will need to accommodate for them. This was preferred by all road users, irrespective of their vehicle mode. Exploring new tech is vital for identifying more efficient ways of doing things, while user trust is seen as something that will happen over time as people get used to new tech. Monitoring the performance of new roads and linking with other organisations is something roads users felt should be done regardless but is less of a priority overall.

Anything that is overlooked?

A number of road users mentioned the idea of having more service stations and stops on the road network. With preparing the physical network for the new generation of vehicles, i.e. by adding more charging points, it will be important to continue improving the facilities for older modes of transport alongside these in the meantime.
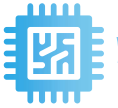
> *"On my journey there was only one service station so perhaps more stop points".*

Car user for leisure, Disabled

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Variations and differences

HGV and van drivers

From the group discussions it was clear that HGV and van drivers were far more aware of the latest technologies and the usage of these in the future. These road users mentioned how their companies were already using automated vehicles and were more aware of the infrastructure currently in place for new generation vehicles and what still needs to be done to improve this. They also feel that more needs to be done to improve the understanding of future technologies for other road users as a change towards new technology is inevitable.

"

"The main thing I think is important with technologies is that people understand them - we see a lot of 'nuisance' lane closures, road closures, and speed restrictions but if people better understand the reason why these are taking place then it would help and in turn get them to buy in and invest in the future of the technologies."

South East

"

"The future will be automated cars and lorries and the road network needs to be ready, the technology is moving very fast."

South West

"

Companies developing these technologies may stop if they think the right infrastructure to support their developments is not going to be in place."

South East

"

"I think it is important to have a strong understanding the benefit to consumers and how they respond to the changes. Once this is known the introduction of technology will be better received…Without a user trust in technology none of the other sub-areas can be successfully implemented so I think it is important first to gain the trust of the consumer, and then slowly introduce other areas.."

East

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Strategic objective: Growing the economy

Priority themes within the objective

1. Supporting immediate economic growth
2. Enabling long-term economic growth
3. Project Speed
4. Levelling up

"

"The main focus should firstly be on those areas that will provide immediate returns to the economy in order to kickstart it as quickly as possible. Although investment in more distant areas is important, this is a longer term decision to be taken when the economy can support it."

Car user for leisure, North East

"

"Without a viable road or transport sector, businesses cannot increase or grow and this will force the country into negative stability especially having left Europe,"

Car user for work, North West

Rationale

Economic growth in the immediate term proved most important among road users given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and exit from the European Union. In the eyes of road users, the network is a way of getting the "ball rolling" on growing the economy and enables the transport of goods and reaching destinations which is imperative from supporting economic growth. Inevitably, this will enable long-term economic growth, but the priority must be the immediate term as we transition out of this period of time.

Project Speed is seen more as a 'nice aspiration to have' as faster delivery of road improvements and infrastructure renewal would definitely minimise disruption. However the need for appropriate balance was mentioned, concern that the long-term quality of the road network improvements might be compromised by too much focus on speeding up the process.

The majority of road users feel that levelling-up is less of a concern though they do understand that areas should have equal opportunities. They wanted to be sure that the areas selected need connecting and 'levelling-up' and wanted to be sure it would not divert resources away from growing the economy on a national level.

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Variations and differences

Differences in opinion on levelling-up by region

There are some key differences in opinion on the concept of levelling up areas that are less well-connected. In the areas in that bracket, such as the East and North of England which would potentially benefit, there is hesitancy over whether this is worthy investment for the future. In areas where the network is more extensive, such as in the South East, there seems to be far more support for this.

"Is it worth investing and creating roads where there isn't industry to encourage it? Which way around should we do things?"

Car user for work, East

"levelling up or equalling out economic prosperity across the UK is an important aspiration. Grants and new opportunities from Brexit can help with this but I don't think it will ever be completely achieved."

Car user for leisure, East

"I feel it is very important and a massive opportunity for economic growth and creating more jobs with Brexit as coastal areas may have new opportunities and business ventures available"

Van driver, South East

"I believe that the main focus should firstly be on those areas that will provide immediate returns to the economy in order to kickstart it as quickly as possible. Although investment in more distant areas is important, this is more of a longer term decision to be taken further down the line when the economy can support it.
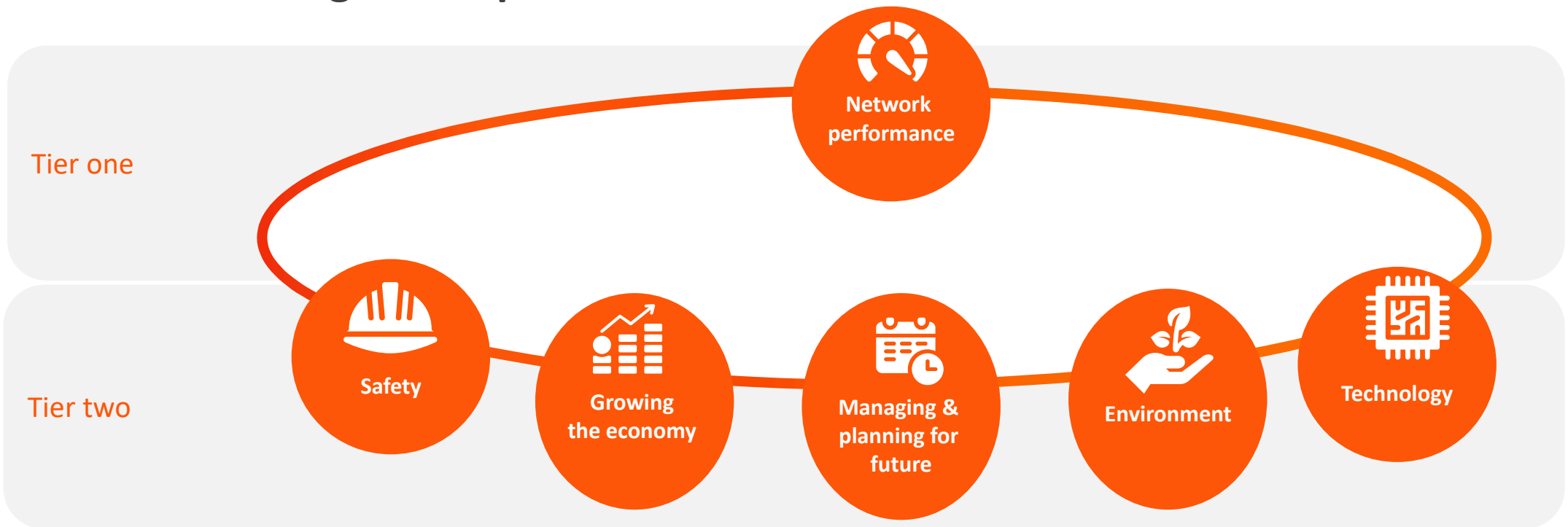
Car user for leisure, North East

"I think this is important because we need to be better connected with other counties, there also needs to be a better understanding if a project needs to be rerouted and they can't make as much money as previous planned."

Car user for leisure, South East

"Roads are important to level up social and economic inequalities"

Motorcyclist, South East

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The Fleet managers' perspective

The Fleet managers' emphasis for RIS3

Tier one

Network performance

Tier two

Safety

Growing the economy

Managing & planning for future

Environment

Technology

- *Tier one: Network performance*

Getting from A to B reliably and efficiently was the clear tier one priority for majority of fleet managers with other objectives getting secondary mentions.

- *Tier two: Safety for all, Growing the economy, future planning, improved environmental outcomes & technology*

There are environmentally focused fleet managers, economic growth focused fleet managers, technology focused fleet managers and safety focused fleet managers, so it is impossible to separate the tier two priorities. Where there was universal support was the priority to get personal road users off the roads wherever it is possible at peak times; and the benefit this would have across multiple objectives. Although approaching from a different angle most fleet managers prioritized the same themes within each objective, except for safety and technology.

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Tier one priority - Network performance

> "Network performance, as for all businesses that rely on the road network this is vital. Unexpected delays are costly and damaging to the businesses reputation if they cannot meet deadlines or even turn up on time for a meeting. Stuck in traffic sounds like a poor excuse. Widening the roads and reducing bottle necks is just as important as using technology to improve safety levels."

> "Whilst all the topics are important in their own right, if pushed to prioritise one over an other then I would say network performance. All topics contribute to the network performance. Having reliable roads, that are strategically designed to manage the workload, the levels of traffic, the types of traffic, and be efficient in terms of availability to the end user is what I would deem most important"

Priority themes within objective – *Same order as personal SRN road users*

1. Avoiding delay
2. Integrated network
3. Connecting the nation

Rationale

For the sake of their livelihoods, avoiding delays was the key priority outcome for most; and getting better information to road users through better use of technology was one of the key solutions.

Other solutions focused on widening motorways and being more efficient with the space on the roads we already have with segregated lanes. Support for an overhaul of personal road user driver education, in particular about travelling at consistent speeds to improve network performance.

> "Avoiding delays is the key, allowing vehicles to achieve their optimum efficiency through well designed timetables, allowing consistent predictable results to maximise passenger satisfaction and confidence in making this their choice for mid and long domestic travel."

> "Avoiding delay is vital to us as all delays have the potential to cost us money. Having workers sat idle in traffic means we are literally paying them to do nothing."

> "With a very tight schedule of appointments and sessions with customers its important that we are able to deliver on time and avoiding delays is key to that. An integrated network where we can spend less time using the fleet for smaller journeys would be ideal as its a more environmentally friendly way to travel. As we currently only work in pockets of the country, a wider connectivity isn't a major concern of our organisation"

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Fleet managers' support for Tier two priority - Safety

Priority themes within objective – *Different order to personal SRN road users*

1. Improving infrastructure towards 2040 zero harm mission
2. ⬆ Understanding role of new technologies
3. ⬆ Improving safety via segregation
4. Improving driver behaviour
5. Perception of safety
6. Road worker safety

Rationale

Strong connection between poor quality of roads and safety. Being more familiar with the new technologies in freight vehicles, fleet managers' recognise the role technology plays in safety and are keen to progress that further than personal road users.

Stronger appetite for segregation or preferably getting other road users off the SRN, highlighting the safety benefits this would bring.

"Safety has to be the key to any investment over the next five years. Roads have deteriorated to such a point you've got to seriously question where the money is being spent. You can have all the best ideas in the world – the best technology, this is going to happen, that is going to happen- but if the roads aren't safe, it just doesn't work."

"Safety is paramount to us. Neglecting safety could have a potentially massive impact on the contracts we currently have and are tendering for."

"Of course cars are improving all the time with ever increasing safety measures installed in cars but I particularly related to understanding the role of new technologies. As a fleet manager I have to admit to not having really considered improving safety for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians using the roads."

"The key thing is understanding the role of new technology as we start to integrate more artificial intelligence into the vehicles. We need to understand the protocols taking place in the event of an incident or an emergency. We need to understand how these technologies will react."

"I think we also need to look at the use of segregated dedicated facilities for these vulnerable groups to maximize their safety and enjoyment."

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Fleet managers' support for Tier two priority - Growing the economy

Of course cars are improving all the time with ever increasing safety measures installed in cars but I particularly related to understanding the role of new technologies. As a fleet manager I have to admit to not having really considered improving safety for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians using the roads.

"Growing the economy is essential post COVID-19 and Brexit, this should and needs to be priority number one, followed by network performance, being the key to maximising the ability of hauliers and PSV operators to make best use of the services they can offer and driving modal shift and environmental change through alternative fuels and enhanced efficiencies."

Priority themes within the objective – *same order as personal SRN road users*

1. Supporting immediate economic growth
2. Enabling long-term economic growth
3. Project Speed
4. Levelling up

Rationale

Fleet managers' feel more strongly than personal road users that the strategic road network is firmly linked with growing the GDP of this country. They and their customers' livelihoods are inexorably linked to the SRN.

Order of priorities are the same as other road users, with some appetite for dualling to support immediate economic growth.

There are doubts about the country's ability to deliver Project Speed compared to the effectiveness of other countries although there is strong appetite for it.

Levelling up not a priority compared to other themes.

"Tackling hotspots, particularly on major routes is a must. Fail to do this and the extra opportunities that might otherwise be available go elsewhere or just don't happen"

"Focusing on projects such as making single carriageways dual carriageways is crucial""

"The road network is vital to the economy and without continued investment will stagnate. Nearly every business relies on the road network for and failure to upgrade and improve it will have a damning lasting affect"

"Support industry wherever it chooses to flourish, of course provide much needed infrastructure in areas that have traditionally lagged behind, but not at the expense of projects that can generate real returns and growth immediately."

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Fleet managers' support for Tier two priority – Managing & planning for the future

Priority themes within the objective – *same order as personal SRN road users*

1. Delivering the right level of maintenance and renewals & Building a resilient infrastructure network

2. Achieving efficiencies

3. Climate change adaptation

Rationale

As with personal road users, acceptance that the themes overlap significantly with other objectives and all are important.

Climate change adaptation was seen as almost as important as the other factors (some even put it on a par) reflecting its rise up the future planning agenda.

" It is difficult to differentiate All the statements are important and I sympathise with Highways England as to how they can plan their investment and projects"

"A resilient network built right in the first place can prevent the constant expensive retrospective projects which we now see happening to make roads fit for task."

"Roads are in a bad state and this causes issues and expense for the businesses who rely on them. It is vital that improvements are completed as quick as possible causing as few delays as possible. Climate change adaption is important but will only happen when the right infrastructure is put in place to encourage the take up of electric vehicles."

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Tier two priority - Improved environmental outcomes

"We can't really carry on with the current pollution and environmental issues that we see. So we need to take more vehicles off the road, at peak times, which would reduce our carbon emissions and create a better network"

Priority themes within the objective – *same order as personal SRN road users*

1. Reducing road user carbon emissions

2. Improving the health and wellbeing for those living next to, working on or using the road network

3. Improving the natural, built and historic environment

Rationale

Fleet managers accept that the nature of their work means they use a lot of vehicles which cause damage to the environment. They are keen to prioritise reducing road user carbon emissions where they can.

They are looking for government support e.g. with respect to focused investment in re-charging facilities for local delivery vehicles. However many feel that hydrogen and biogas might be the most likely long-term alternative for the HGV sector, not electric.

All believe getting personal motorists off the major roads, facilitating active travel or alternative modes of transport such as bus or train, should be a key part of the focus to help reduce road user carbon emissions.

"We have started to replace our fleet with electric and hybrid vehicles so are aware of our impact and we are doing something about it. I think they have to improve the Infrastructure for electric vehicles because at the moment there is a distinct lack of public charging points and they take too long to charge and the mileage for each charge is too low. To encourage mass uptake of electric vehicles all these issues need to be taken care of."
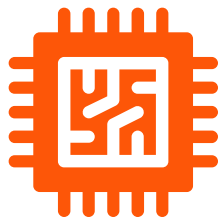
"Other factors don't need a dedicated thought process as a happy by-product of reduced road user carbon emissions, so not something that needs to be exclusively strived for. The key to accessing all of this is government engagement with industry and prioritization of that network over personal motoring."

"It will be some time before the volume of charging stations and or associated technologies allow for a massive push towards electric vehicles. I've heard of 'parking' areas where just by parking, your car will auto charge."

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Fleet managers' support for **Tier two priority - Technology**

Priority themes within the objective – *Different order to personal SRN road users*

1. Ensuring the network is ready for the next generation of vehicles, including CAVs, as well as zero-carbon vehicle rollout

2. Monitoring performance of new roads, and how operation of the network adapts to new technology

3. Linking with organisations managing other road networks

4. Exploring wider benefits/dis-benefits of new tech to consumers

5. A better understanding of user trust in new technology

Rationale

More transport tech savvy than the personal motorist, topics such as a better understanding of user trust and more exploration of benefits were down-weighted by this audience.

Fleet managers still see CAVs as a long way off but respect that the network needs to get ready.

"Getting the network ready for the imminent tech evolution is vital"

"The key is preparing and supporting the haulage and PSV sectors in adopting next generation technologies to enhance reliability and efficiency of the road network, this should be managed and prioritised above and beyond the average motorists needs"

"Monitoring performance will allow government to determine what improvements are worthwhile for actual change and which ones seem to make little difference. Therefore, they will be able to determine how best to use the budgets at their disposal."

"Data collection via technology will help us spot things earlier and help making journey more efficient"

"People will develop trust in new technologies as we become familiar with them so I don't see it as something the network has to worry about.

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Key point summary

➢ Majority understand the draft strategy document and it resonates with them.

➢ The draft objectives align with what road users feel are the most important priorities for investment, with Network Performance most front of mind

➢ There are more similarities between road user types than there are differences, although fleet managers attribute more emphasis to economic growth implications than personal road users

➢ There are no significant gaps in the strategy but sub-themes including provision for wildlife and the development of future service stations should be considered.

➢ The draft strategy meets road users' needs and everyone now wants to see the strategy implemented.

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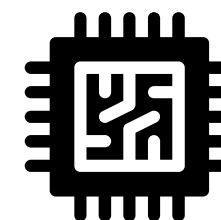
Appendices and contact information

Stimulus document - Introducing draft objectives

Pre-Task – Priorities for 2025 onwards
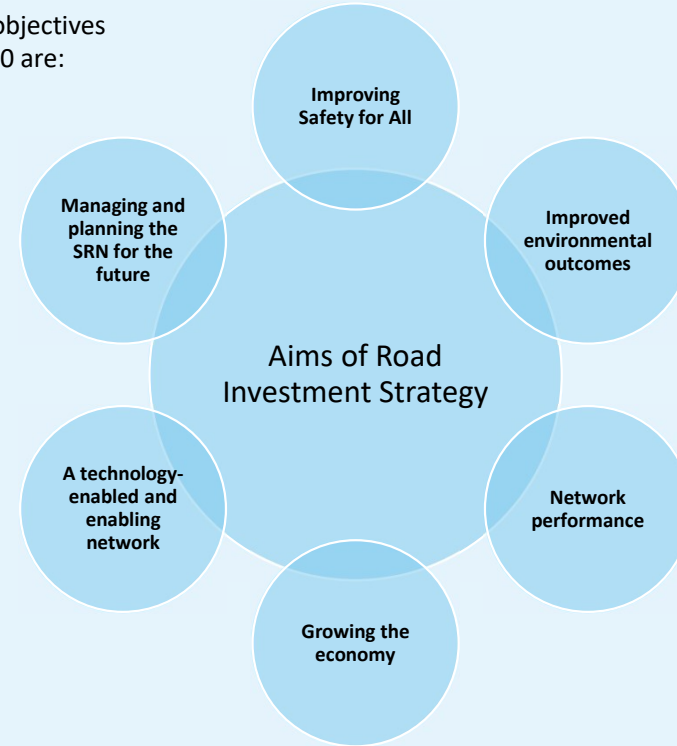*Please read the following prior to the second day of our discussions*

Transport Focus is our client for this research. They are the independent watchdog for transport users like you. Their remit is to put the interests of transport users first with the aim of getting the best deal for them, and that includes for users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads.

The motorways and major 'A' roads in England are run by Highways England on behalf of the Government. Every five years a new strategy is developed for these roads which sets out investment plans for the maintenance and improvement of these roads, and also the level of performance they should achieve – the next one will cover the period from **2025-2030.**

To help with creation of the new strategy, Transport Focus need your help to understand which of the key objectives and themes are most important to you – looking ahead to 2025-2030.

Initial thinking envisages **SIX** key strategic objectives.

The draft objectives
for 2025-30 are:

- Improving Safety for All
- Improved environmental outcomes
- Managing and planning the SRN for the future
- Aims of Road Investment Strategy
- A technology-enabled and enabling network
- Network performance
- Growing the economy

We would like you to review some of the specific areas being looked at for each of the strategic objectives; as well as considering the overall importance of each of them as well.

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Stimulus document – Improving safety for all

A safe and more reliable network is an important priority for England's motorways and major 'A' roads. In terms of reducing accidents for people travelling on these roads; safety of those who work on them; and reducing suicide attempts.

Areas being considered under improving safety

<u>Road user safety</u>

Understanding the role of new technologies

- o Looking at the role new technologies can play in reducing accidents and their severity. This might include things like cars that can drive themselves and changes needed to the road for that to happen, designing vehicles to be safer etc.

Improving driver behaviour

- o Exploring what more can and should be done by using advertising or social media to encourage people to use the roads safely.
- o Looking into whether better information helps drivers them make decisions about their journey more easily and safely, while recognising the risk that too much information can be a distraction while driving.

Improving infrastructure towards the 2040 zero harm vision

- o Considering the *extent* and *type* of safety related improvements to the condition of the existing roads and related equipment, to be on track to reduce deaths and serious injuries on England's motorways and major 'A' roads to zero by 2040.

Improving safety for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians using or crossing these roads

- o Delivering the long term ambition of segregated footpaths and cycle paths on the major 'A' roads.

Improving perception of safety, particularly of vulnerable groups using these roads

- o Exploring what can be done to encourage active travel (walking, cycling, and horse-riding), and support use of England's motorways and major 'A' roads by disabled users.

<u>Road worker safety</u>

Improving safety for staff and all those working on the roads

- o Identifying where Highways England could learn from other sectors undertaking similar activities
- o Using modern construction techniques and working practices for to improve road worker safety while minimising disruption for road users.

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Stimulus document – Network performance

This draft objective considers what England's motorways and major 'A' roads are expected to deliver for the country now and in the future – smooth running, dependable long-distance journeys at good speeds.

It centres on reliability and avoiding delay; creating a network that links with other modes of transport and integrates well with roads run by Councils to support end to end journeys; and connecting the nation. Improving network performance can work against other desirable improvements (e.g. lower speeds may be safer, but could result in longer journey times) – there may be some trade-offs.

Areas being considered for improving network performance

Avoiding delay

Better provision of information to road users

o   Particularly about disruption and delays but also in relation to other things road users wish to know more about

Measuring the reliability of network performance more effectively

o   Measuring things in a way that makes sense to road users, particularly freight and logistics operators.
o   Knowing where on the network reliable performance is particularly important
o   Understanding if 'depot reach' is an aspect of network performance that can be improved for freight operators.

Creating an integrated network

Linking with other transport networks

o   Exploring how England's motorways and major 'A' roads should link into other transport network e.g. park and ride schemes or at strategic rail interchanges.
o   Better understanding what users want when moving between transport modes e.g. from road to rail and understanding the issues that prevent part car/part public transport journeys being more seriously considered

Connecting the nation

Use of the roads post COVID and post Brexit

o   Understanding how traffic, including lorry traffic, to ports and airports is likely to change in the future.

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Stimulus document –Improved environmental outcomes

There is a 25 Year Environment Plan that sets out bold intentions to stop and reverse environmental decline in the UK, with many of its aspirations expected to become law through the Environment Bill currently being considered by Parliament. The UK government is also committed to achieving Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Net Zero Carbon and green industrial revolution plans will be underpinned by a Transport Decarbonisation Plan. Finally, there is increasing understanding of the damage to human health caused by poor air quality, including the impact of small particulates (Particulate Matter 2.5).

Areas being considered under improving environmental outcomes

Reducing road user carbon emissions

o   Supporting the target requiring the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050
o   Expanding and evolving rapid-charging infrastructure for electric vehicles and establishing other low carbon fuel supplies on or adjacent to England's motorways and major 'A' roads.
o   Actively manage traffic (e.g. through variable speed limits) to potentially reduce emissions from exhaust pipes

o   Better understand what else could reduce road user carbon emissions
o   Facilitating less polluting choices by encouraging car-sharing, public transport, and active travel where appropriate.
o   Minimising 'whole life' carbon impact of England's motorways and major 'A' roads (i.e. looking at the carbon involved in designing, building and then maintaining the roads)

Improving health and well-being for those living next to, working on or using the road network

o   Continuing to improve air quality on England's motorways and major 'A' roads including limiting Nitrogen Dioxide (NO_2) and Particulate Matter 2.5 emissions, and reducing the impact of road noise for communities next to the roads.
o   Understanding how the shift to electric vehicles reduces problem levels of Particulate Matter 2.5 in the medium to long term, and the implications for the case for future road improvements (e.g. building extra lanes).

Improving the natural, built and historic environment.

o   Working towards a net gain in biodiversity for specific projects and across the programme of investment in the 2025-30 strategy. Improving wider environmental performance through a Natural Capital approach, including addressing the impact of England's motorways and major 'A' roads on water quality. Also, that roads are designed to fit in appropriately with the landscape and the needs of local communities.

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Stimulus document – Growing the economy

Businesses that rely on England's motorways and major 'A' roads are estimated to contribute £314 billion to England's economy and employ more than 7.4 million people. These roads unlock opportunities for employment and leisure within the UK. They also play an important role in facilitating new housing development. A significant economic contribution is also made directly as a result of investment in improving these roads, as well as maintaining them on a day to day basis.

Areas being considered under growing the economy

Supporting immediate economic growth

o Focusing investment on where England's motorways and major 'A' roads are vital in transporting goods / people across the country; to the sectors of the economy most reliant on those roads; to the parts of the country most reliant on them (e.g. the national parks, the South West)

o Looking at how dualling roads (turning single carriageways into dual carriageways) could boost the economy in specific areas and if so the sort of jobs that would be created

o Providing the businesses that carry out work for Highways England with funding to invest in technology and boost skills in their workforce.

Enabling long-term economic growth:

o Supporting housing development, jobs, and businesses logistics needs through road improvements

o Tackling 'hotspots' where journey times are slow or unreliable (e.g. because of congestion); and providing new junctions to get on and off the network.

Levelling-up:

o Supporting growth across the UK, particularly those coastal and border areas which are poorly connected; and helping businesses respond to new opportunities created by Brexit.

o Identifying the best way to measure how England's motorways and major 'A' roads are contributing to the Government's 'levelling up' objectives (e.g. increasing social inclusion, improving productivity).

o Understanding that if investment is re-routed to lower productivity areas, in the short term, lower returns on investment and economic growth might be expected; and should be accepted.

Project Speed

o Aimed at realising economic benefits earlier by faster planning, design and delivery of road improvements (e.g. widening roads, building new ones) and renewal of worn out infrastructure on the existing roads.

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Stimulus document – Managing & planning for the future

One of Highways England's main purposes is to maintain the motorways and major 'A' roads England already has, while planning for the future. The investment strategy for 2025-30 will need to tackle some big issues. For instance, most motorways in England were built in the 1960s and 1970s and many of them will reach the end of their design life at about the same time. These roads are often the most heavily-used and strategically important routes in the UK transport network, meaning that it would be extremely disruptive if they had to be closed (e.g. because of the condition of a bridge).

Areas being considered under managing and planning for the future

Delivering the right level of maintenance and renewals

Maintaining and renewing roads at the right time in their lifecycle benefits network performance (e.g. the quality of the road surface) but does not generally deliver the level of economic benefit that large scale projects can bring (e.g. a major new road). The right level of funding to operate, maintain and renew the motorways and major 'A' roads we already have will need to reflect:

o The impacts of underinvestment e.g. asset failure, increased disruption.
o Desired performance in terms of safety, delays and other road user impacts, but also in terms of the environment (carbon, biodiversity).
o Opportunities to deliver improvements to performance as a result of replacing worn out infrastructure, e.g. replacing a life-expired junction with an improved layout.
o Understanding the specific aspects of maintaining and replacing the infrastructure that is of most value to road users.

Achieving efficiencies

o Understanding how to make providing England's motorways and major 'A' roads more efficient, without Highways England being so lean that it does not have the capacity to respond to unexpected crises.
o Using modern, digital design and construction techniques; standardisation of components to enable more efficient, safer and less disruptive (to the road user) offsite manufacturing; digital rehearsals and controls on site and automated plant (e.g. earth moving vehicles) in construction.

Climate Change adaptation

o Continue to assess likely impacts of climate change, and make necessary adaptations to England's motorways and major 'A' roads to maintain performance in face of these threats. This includes the resilience of the road surface, bridges and embankments to more extreme weather; how the network interacts with the natural and built landscape; and user experience (e.g. more frequent lane closures due to flooding).
o Making sure operational response to extreme weather is sufficient in the face of increasingly frequent severe storms.
o Incorporating a climate mitigation strategy into future planning.

Building a resilient infrastructure network.

o Identifying the risk of multiple things going wrong across the network at the same time and developing suitable responses.
o Planning programmes to replace existing roads, including bridges and other structures, that are spread out geographically and in time to avoid a future peak when everything has to be renewed at the same time.
o Identifying where network resilience is so low that it discourages investment, employment and social activity in these locations, and measuring these dis-benefits.

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Stimulus document – A technology enable / enabling network

Technology has the potential to revolutionise the way roads are used and managed. This objective has been included primarily for its potential to support the previously mentioned long-term strategic objectives.

Areas being considered under delivery of a technology-enabled / enabling network

<u>**Digital for customers**</u>

Ensuring the network is ready for the next generation of vehicles, including Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CAVs) i.e. cars that can drive themselves, as well as zero-carbon vehicle rollout

o Preparing the physical network, and supporting data communication links for autonomous vehicles through technology trials and approach to building capability to scale.
o Utilising data and supporting open data architecture to better support connected vehicles on the network, and support users through better, more tailored information to support pre-journey planning in-journey decisions.
o Potentially, beginning to offer some vehicles priority over others (e.g. to encourage car sharing)
o Getting the best balance between communicating with the driver, and communicating with the vehicle

Linking with organisations managing other road networks

o Ensuring technology works across boundaries (e.g. local councils, Transport for London, Scotland and Wales), particularly around managing traffic and data exchange.

Exploring wider benefits/ dis-benefits of new tech to consumers

o Potential new ways the consumers interact with road travel.
o Understanding if cars that can drive themselves could open up possibilities for people to be more productive with their travel time.

A better understanding of user trust in new technology

o Understanding if people will be less forgiving to instances of technological failure than they are to human error.

<u>**Digital for operation**</u>

Monitoring performance of new roads, and how operation of the network adapts to new technology

o Have roads that report automatically that they need maintenance, allowing it to be planned with less disruption to road users
o Further improve technology to detect accidents/breakdowns and enable a faster response, so improving safety and getting the road open again more quickly.
o Learning from other organisations about how new technology can drive efficiencies.

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Sample overview – groups by region

	South West	South East	North West	North East	West Midlands	East Midlands	East
Car user – leisure	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Car user – work	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Van drivers	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Lorry drivers	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Motorcycle users	1	1	1	1	1**	1**	1
Pedestrians	-		1	-	1**	1	-
Horse riders	1*	1	-	1	-	-	-
Cyclists	-	1	-	1	-	-	1
Total	5	7	6	7	6	6	6

Eligibility

- Car users – to have used the SRN on at least six occasions in the last 12 months and at least monthly in 2019
- Van and lorry drivers – use the SRN currently and at least weekly
- Motorcyclists – use the SRN currently and at least monthly
- Horse riders, cyclists and pedestrians – regularly rides/cycles or walks on/alongside the SRN, to have used the SRN on at least six occasions in the last 12 months and at least monthly in 2019. Also have to vehicle owner.

Other criteria

- Mix of ethnic background
- Mix of gender
- Good spread of age across the groups from 18 to 75+ years (mixed within groups)

Total of 43 respondents.

*Unable to make groups so conducted as depth
**These respondents completed Day 1 of Recollective only.

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Sample overview – disabled respondents and live journeys

**Disabled and additional respondents**

- 3 x car users and 1 x horse rider
- Mobility issues or mental health
- Not geographically specific (from East, South East and South West)
- Mix of ethnic background and gender
- Good spread of age across the groups from 18 to 75+ years (mixed within groups)

Total of 4 respondents.

Fleet managers'

- Individuals whose job is either dedicated to managing the vehicle fleet for their company (min. 25 vehicles) or managing at companies who are responsible for delivering fleet management solutions to businesses in the UK
- Not geographically specific (from East, North East and South West)
- Mix of ethnic background and gender
- Good spread of age across the groups from 18 to 75+ years (mixed within groups)

Total of 6 respondents.

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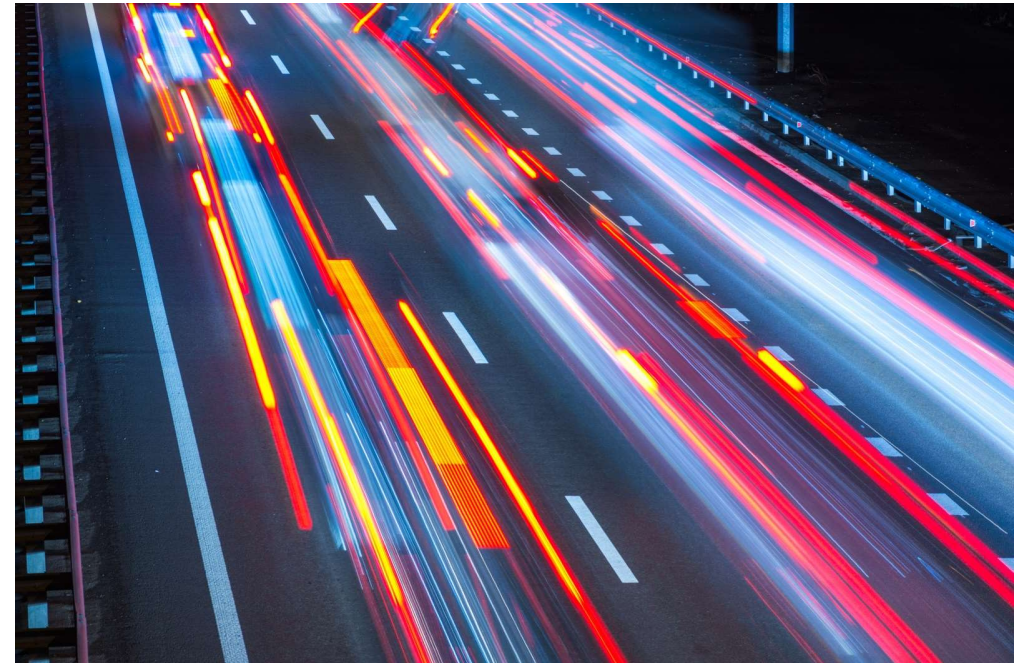
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