



Strategic Roads User Survey

Findings for the North West: August 2022 – July 2023

December 2023

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Introduction



Strategic Roads User Survey

Transport Focus represents the interests of users of England's motorways and major A-roads, known as the Strategic Road Network (SRN). These are the roads managed by National Highways on behalf of the Government.

Through the Strategic Roads User Survey (SRUS), Transport Focus gathers journey experience feedback from a representative sample of SRN users.

SRUS is also used by the Office of Rail and Road to monitor National Highways' performance.



Results in this report cover 12 months:
August 2022 – July 2023



Push-to-web approach

Invitation letters are posted to a representative sample of households in England.

Instructions in the letter direct participants to an online survey, for which participants are incentivised.



Participants answer about:

Their most recent journey on the SRN within the last four weeks at the time of completing the survey.

One specific motorway or major A road within this journey (defined using an interactive map). This ensures feedback is received for all regions and across a full range of roads within them.



9,091 responses received in total over this period
1,387 for roads in the North West

Key findings: SRN experience in the North West

71% of SRN journeys in the North West are felt to be satisfactory

Nationally, journeys are rated a little less well so far in 2023 than through 2022; in contrast the North West has seen more positive change and is now in line with the national average, also 71%



An improved picture for the North West relative to England as whole, with more satisfactory journey times on average in 2023 than in 2022, linked to some reduction of perceived roadworks and congestion



However, despite a reduction, congestion and roadworks are still reported frequently in the North West, and are key factors for dissatisfaction. In particular:

- Congestion is perceived as high and has a big impact on journeys in Cheshire and Merseyside
- Reducing the impact of roadworks is most pressing in Lancashire and Cumbria
- ...these issues are especially evident on M6 (in both areas) and M60 (in Cheshire and Merseyside)



In addition, other major factors in dissatisfactory journeys are:

- **Poor road upkeep and presentation** – especially lighting and cats' eyes which are rated poorly in the North West compared to other regions. This is exacerbated by the higher perceived incidence of roadworks, given that poor lighting is more noticeable and impactful in this scenario, and by reportedly poorer weather than elsewhere
- **Variable speed restrictions** – linked to disruption issues but often felt to change too often (which itself is perceived to cause erratic driving) and unnecessarily
- **Other, unexpected and unplanned disruption**, which while seen to be less frequent than roadworks or chronic congestion, can be more impactful

Other trends, which are also common across the whole SRN network:



Safety perceptions generally high, but some groups feel less at ease (and journeys on North West roads feel less safe so far in 2023 than 2022).

Better weather mitigation and driver behaviour, and more consistent traffic momentum, could all alleviate stress.



Poor driving perceived as common – and while drivers are accountable, some SRN users feel that the way roads are managed can also provoke this.



Attitudes still mixed about smart motorways, with strong negative opinions and poorer experiences vs other motorways, for some motorists.



Motorcyclists and HGV drivers less satisfied overall, experiencing the same issues as others when they occur, but to a sharper degree.

Overall findings: key metrics



71% of journeys in the North West are felt to be satisfactory: in line with the national average across most key measures

Key metrics
Aug 2022 – Jul 2023



Overall satisfaction

71%

Very satisfied 30%
Fairly satisfied 41%

Journey time

71%

Very satisfied 33%
Fairly satisfied 38%

Management of roadworks

46%

Very satisfied 15%
Fairly satisfied 31%

Feeling safe

81%

Very safe 31%
Fairly safe 50%

All regions, England-wide

71%

Very satisfied 31%
Fairly satisfied 41%

70%

Very satisfied 32%
Fairly satisfied 37%

47%

Very satisfied 14%
Fairly satisfied 32%

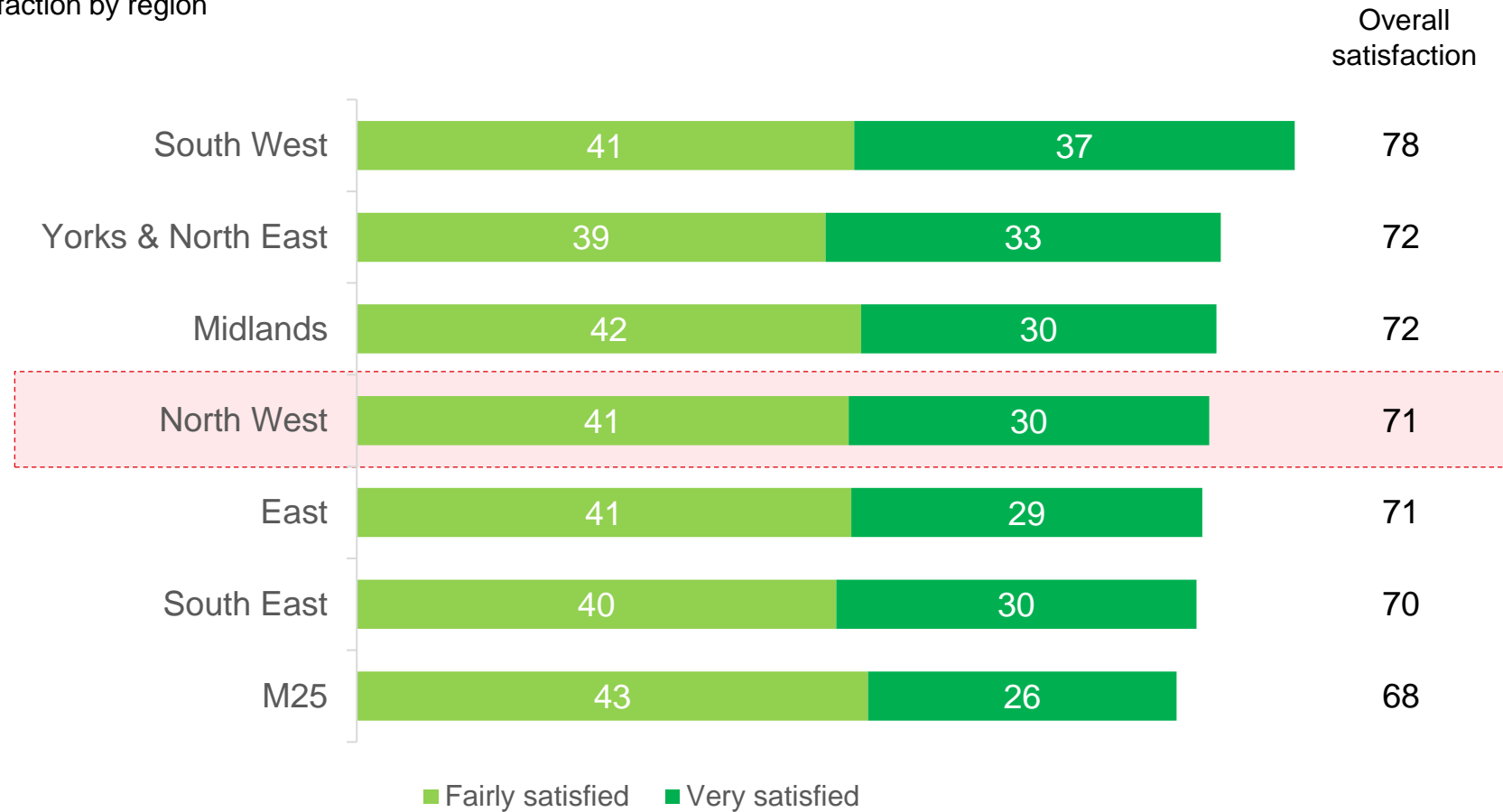
82%

Very safe 30%
Fairly safe 52%

Base: all SRN users surveyed, Aug '22 – Jul '23
All: overall satisfaction (9,055), journey time (9,056), roadworks management (2,137), feeling safe (9,054)
North West: overall satisfaction (1,382), journey time (1,382), roadworks management (382), feeling safe (1,379)

Most regions performing similarly across this period as a whole, South West leads and M25 region is lowest

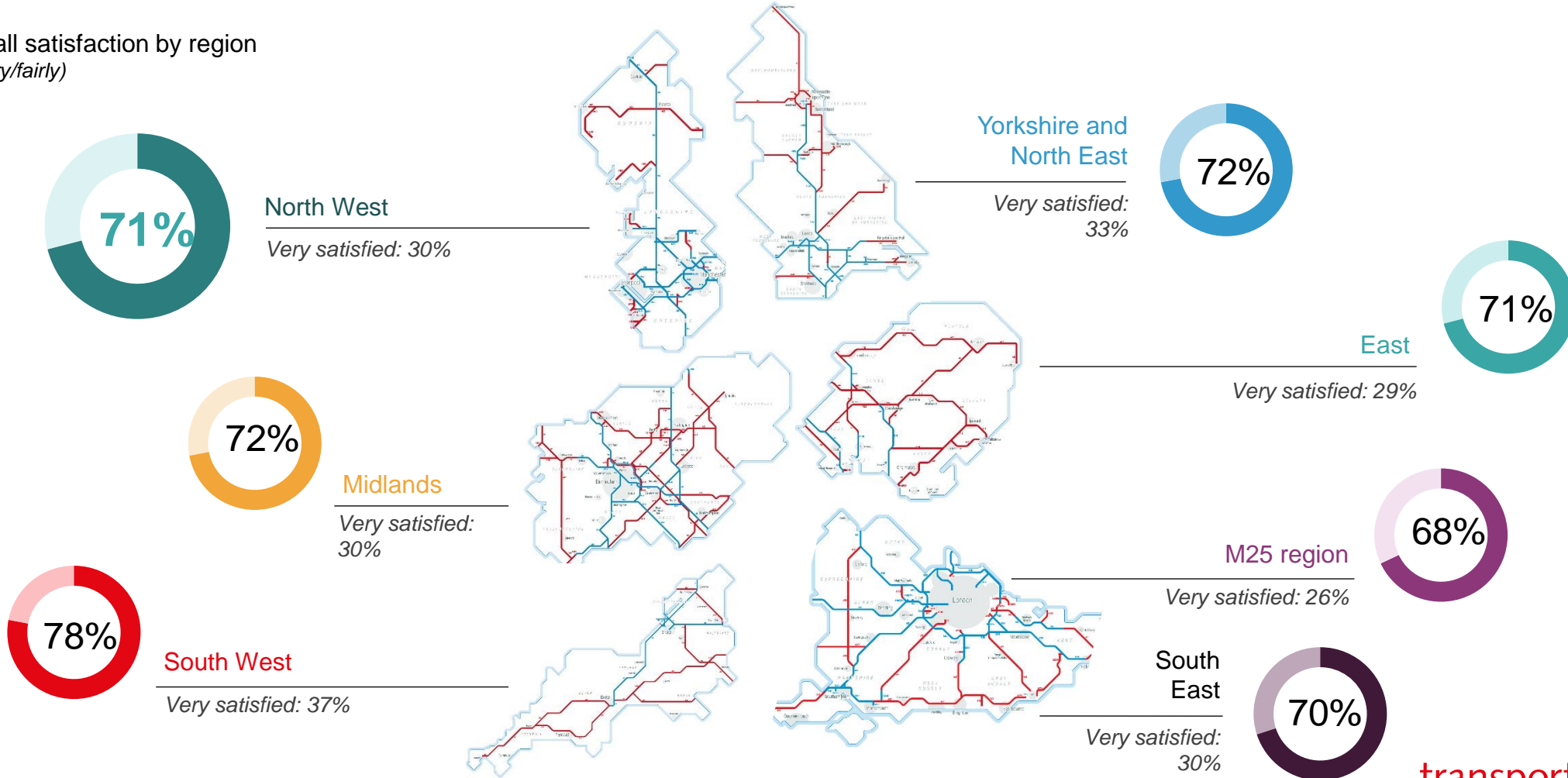
Overall satisfaction by region
(% very/fairly)



Base: all SRN users surveyed, Aug '22 – Jul '23 (9,055)
South West (1,033), Yorkshire and NE (1,442), Midlands (1,985), North West (1,382), East (1,299), South East (1,712), M25 region (1,355)

Most regions performing similarly across this period as a whole, South West leads and M25 region is lowest

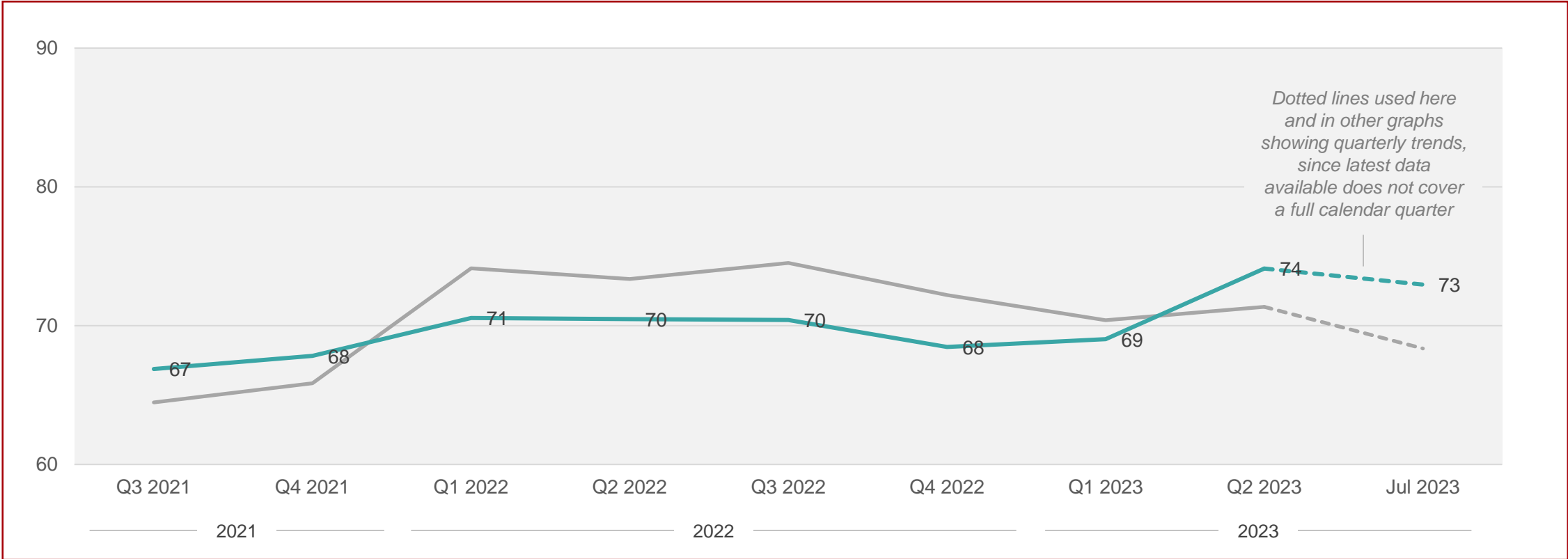
Overall satisfaction by region
(% very/fairly)



Base: all SRN users surveyed, Aug '22 – Jul '23 (9,055)
South West (1,033), Yorkshire and NE (1,442), Midlands (1,985), North West (1,382), East (1,299), South East (1,712), M25 region (1,355)

Nationally, so far in 2023 journeys are slightly less satisfactory than through 2022; **in contrast the North West has seen a more positive change recently**

Overall satisfaction, over last two years (% very/fairly, quarterly)

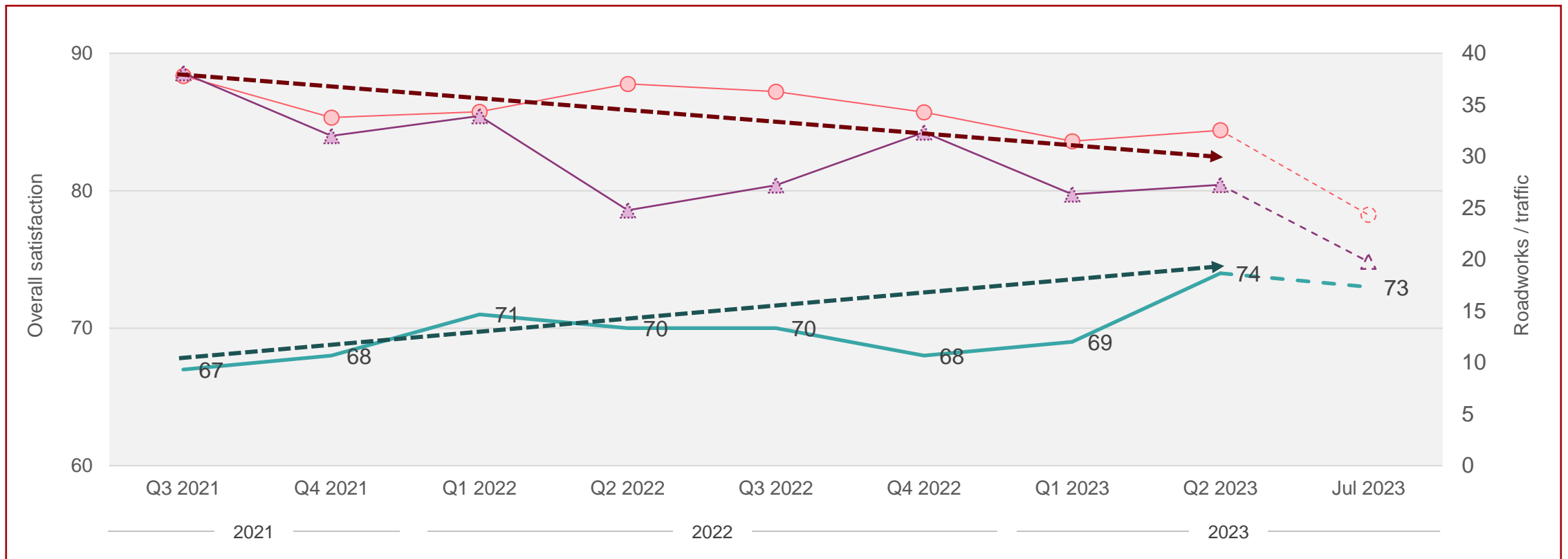


North West
All regions

Base: all SRN users surveyed, Jul '21 – Jul '23 (average 1,928 per quarter; 779 in Jul '23)
North West: (average 292 per quarter; 115 in Jul '23)

The North West's long term improvement in journey satisfaction is undoubtedly linked to a reduction in the perceived prevalence of roadworks and congestion

Overall satisfaction vs perceived roadworks and level of traffic, over last two years (% very/fairly, quarterly, North West)



- Overall satisfaction
- Passed through roadworks
- Heavy / congested traffic

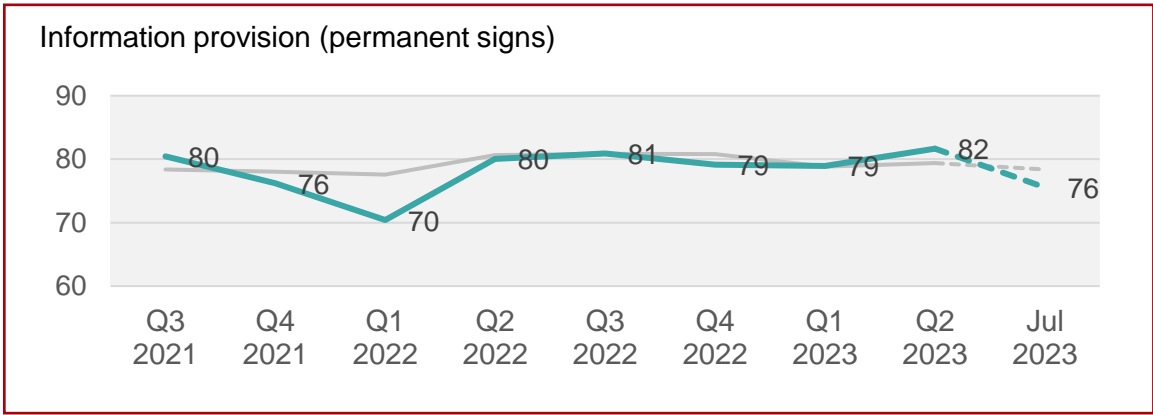
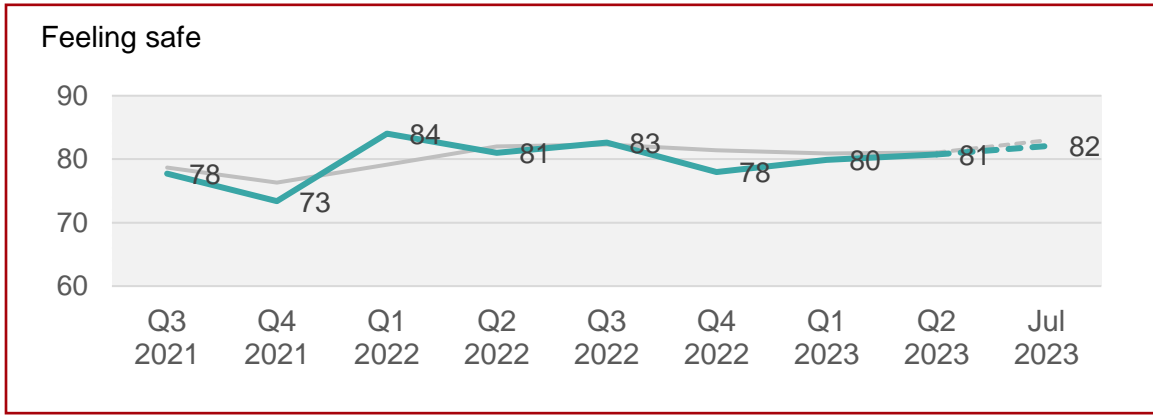
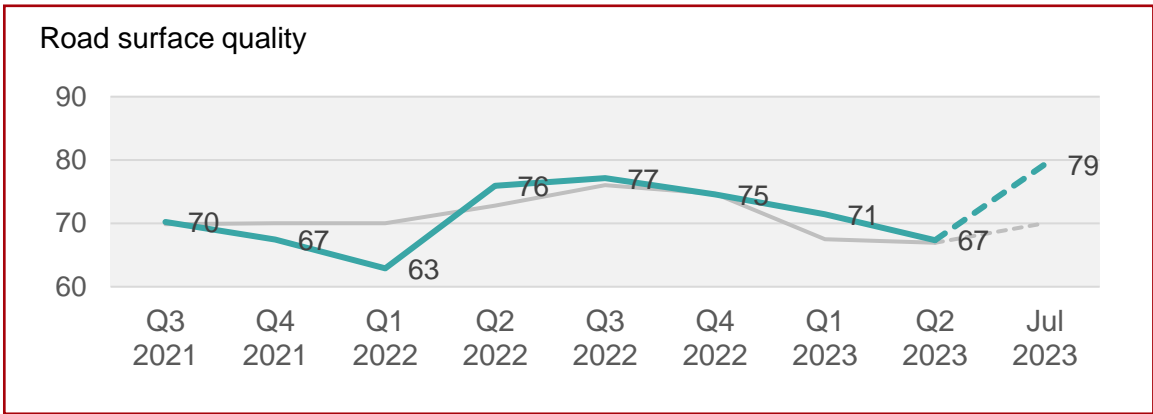
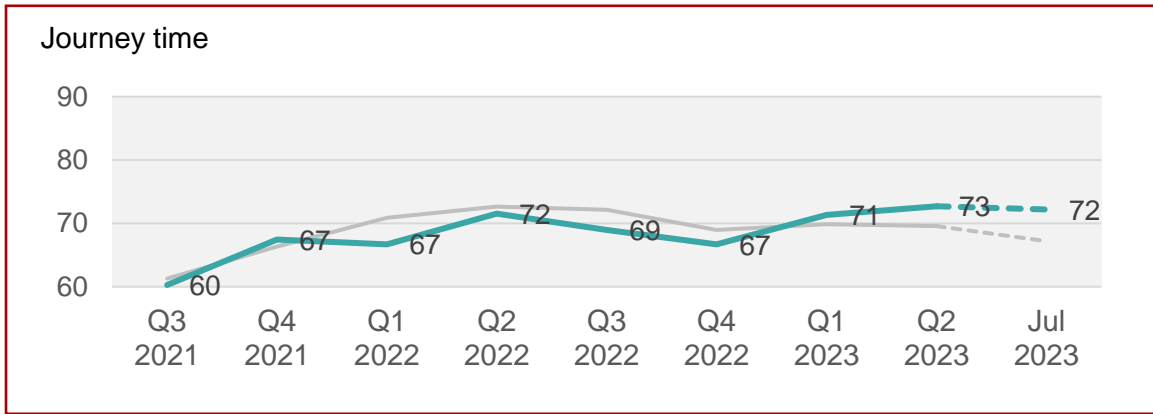
Base: all SRN users surveyed, Jul '21 – Jul '23
 North West: (average 292 per quarter; 115 in Jul '23)

Further patterns by area within the North West and some of its busier roads



Correspondingly, satisfaction with **journey times** looks to be the North West's **key area of improvement** in 2023 so far (and indeed over the last two years)

Key metrics over last two years (% very/fairly, quarterly; all key metrics which are answered by all survey respondents*)

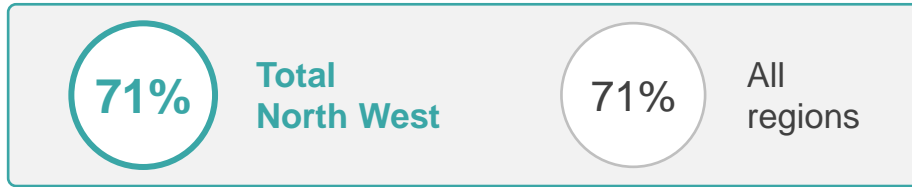


— North West
— All regions

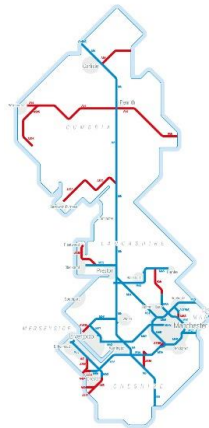
Base: all SRN users surveyed, Jul '21 – Jul '23 (average 1,825-1,926 per quarter; 742-782 in Jul '23)
North West: (average 278-292 per quarter; 111-115 in Jul '23)

*Other “key metrics”, which are relevant to a sub-set of the total survey sample, are covered in more detail later in this report. These are the ratings of roadworks management, and of information provision via electronic signs

The North West's two sub-areas, and its different road types, largely perform in line with the national average – but individual roads deliver varied experiences



Overall satisfaction by road type/area/road: North West



Motorways	71%
(All regions)	71%
Major A roads	70%
(All regions)	71%



88% responses for the North West are for motorway journeys, vs 62% on average across all regions.



Area 10	Cheshire and Merseyside	69%
Area 13	Lancashire and Cumbria	70%



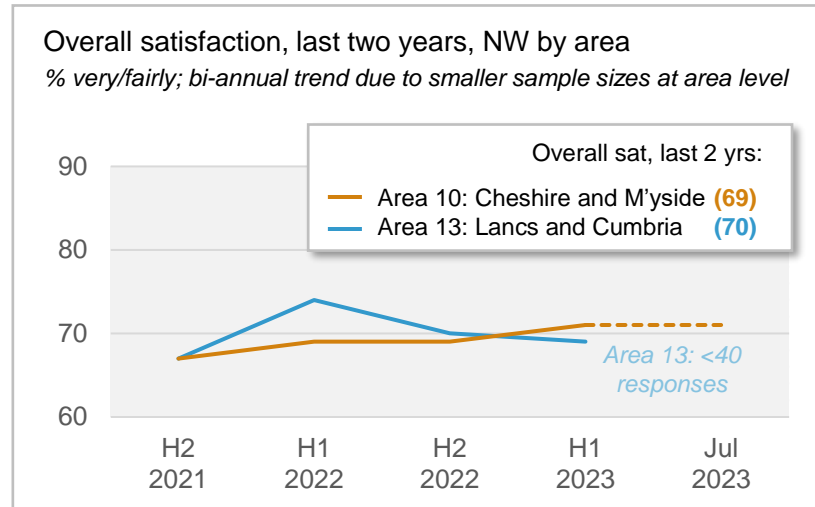
84% of responses for the North West relate to Area 10 (Cheshire and Merseyside)

M53	85
M61	79
M65	78
M56	73
M62	72
M60	68
M6	65
A66	70

*Results shown for individual roads where sample size is ≥75. All data at road level based on two years: Aug '21 – Jul '23.
 All Motorways: All regions (4,846), North West (1,154). All major A Roads: All regions (4,209), North West (228).
 Area 10 in North West (including both motorways and major A roads) (2,015), Area 13 (including both motorways and major A roads) (495)

Key by area within the North West are: the level and impact of perceived congestion for the more urban Area 10, and roadworks impact in Area 13

Improvements over this period driven by Cheshire and Merseyside

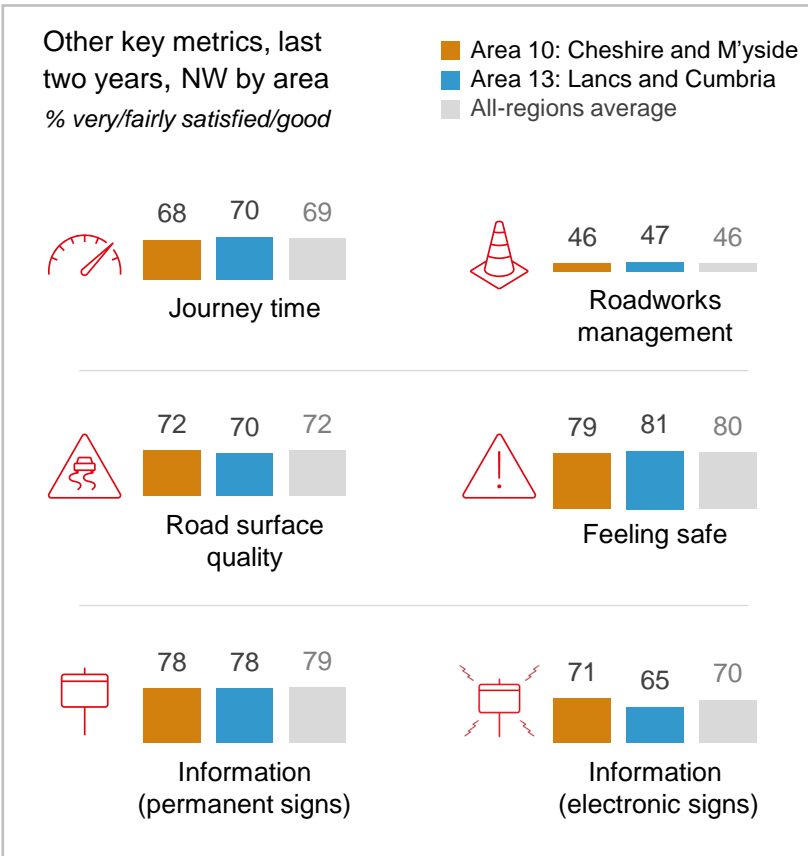


Increased satisfaction in Cheshire and Merseyside is strongly linked with a perceived reduction in congestion, which had previously been particularly high, over the same period.

The spike in journey satisfaction in Lancashire and Cumbria during early 2022 corresponded with a brief period in which the perceived occurrence of roadworks was reduced from a high point in 2021. However, reports of roadworks increased again in Lancashire and Cumbria through the rest of 2022 and early 2023, serving to hold back overall journey satisfaction as shown in the graph above.

Base: all SRN users surveyed, Jul '21 – Jul '23; North West Area 10 (average 490 per half year), Area 13 (average 123 per half year)

Across last two years as a whole, both North West areas perform in line with average for all regions of England



Base: all SRN users surveyed, Aug '21 – Jul '23; North West Area 10 (2,015), Area 13 (495)

Other contextual factors confirm the key priorities

Though reduced over the last two years, perceived congestion is higher in Cheshire and Merseyside than in Lancashire and Cumbria – and is the top reason for dissatisfaction here.

“...bumper to bumper all the way at about 4mph on average, ...Took over 2 hours to get ...8 miles.”

Linked to this, people in Cheshire and Merseyside are more likely to set off earlier for contingency, and (despite this) journeys are more likely to be delayed than in Lancashire and Cumbria.

Roadworks are felt to be handled similarly in both areas but are consistently reported more often in Lancashire and Cumbria. This is the top reason for dissatisfaction here, along with associated issues like lane closures, speed limitations, and others' poor driving.

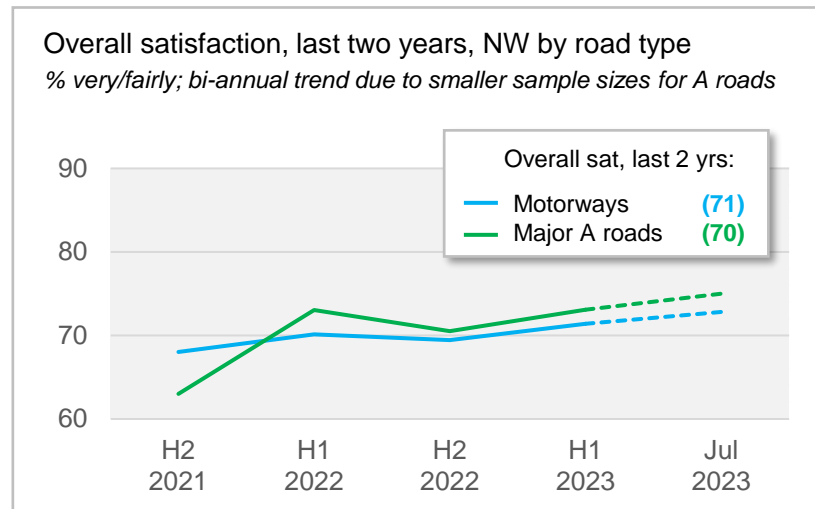
“Continuing roadworks for miles. Poor lane discipline from other road users”

Cheshire and Merseyside (area 10) also...

- Includes more smart motorway (affecting 39% journeys vs. 20% in area 13)
- Sees very slightly higher travel for work reasons (17% vs 14%)

These points apply for all types of road, though roadworks reported as especially prevalent on North West motorways. Communication a further challenge for major A roads in the North West.

Improvement in journey experience in the North West evident on both major A roads and motorways in the region

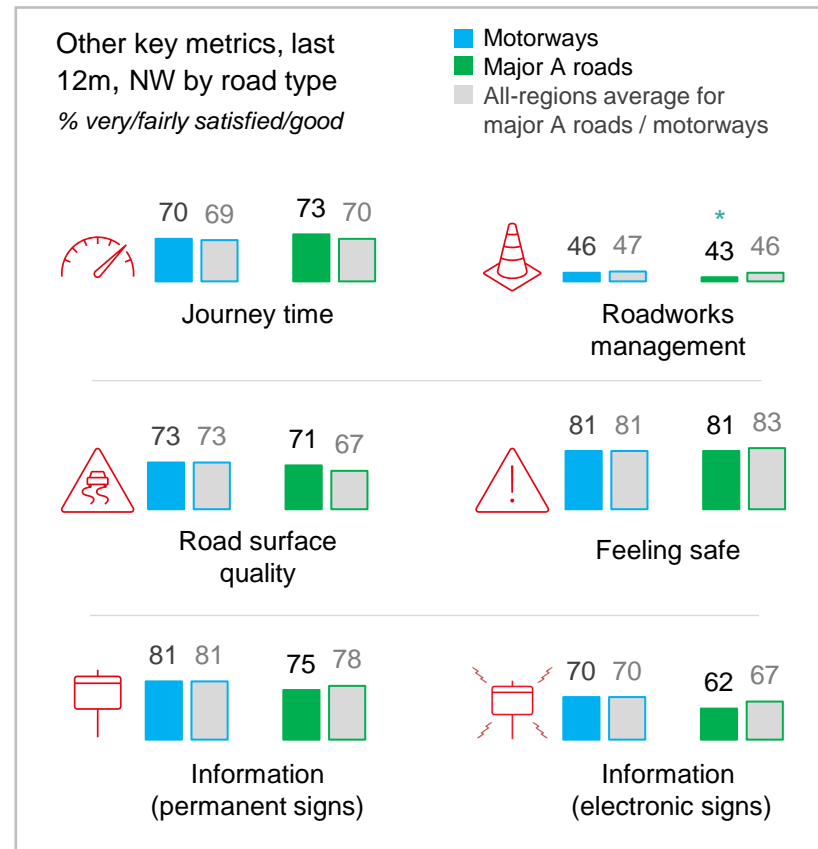


Sharp increase in overall journey satisfaction on major A roads in early 2022 corresponds with **perceived reduction in congestion** (also linked to the reduction in reported roadworks in Lancashire and Cumbria at this time).

In addition to this, reports of roadworks and congestion have continued to reduce across both types of road in the North West into 2023, most notably on major A roads.

Base: all SRN users surveyed, Jul '21 – Jul '23; North West Motorways (average 484 per half year), Major A roads (average 101 per half year)

....meaning the region's motorways now perform in line with average across a range of areas; its **major A roads are slightly weaker around communication with drivers**



Base: all SRN users, Aug '22–Jul '23; North West Motorways (1,154), major A roads (228). * CAUTION: SMALLER SAMPLE SIZE WHERE THIS MEASURE IS ASKED OF A SUBSET OF ALL SRN USERS (40)

Other notable factors

Roadworks are perceived to be high on North West motorways (35% of journeys affected, versus the all-region average of 26% for motorways). Roadworks are perceived to be **much less prevalent on major A roads**, reflecting the national average.

Lighting and cats' eyes provision are below the average for equivalent road types on both major A roads and motorways in the North West.

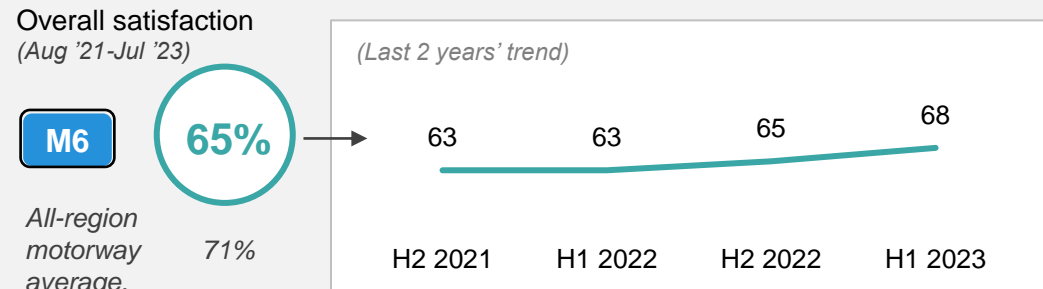
“ The upgrade to a smart motorway between junctions 5 and 7 [M56] is STILL not finished. Completion was timed for the Autumn of 2022. ”

“ Lighting poor. Road markings poor. Road drainage poor. Cats eyes none existent [M58] ”

M6, while still delivering among the least satisfactory journeys nationwide, epitomises much of the improving picture for North West overall *(and a similar story on M60)*

Below-average satisfaction, though on the rise through 2022 and into 2023 (due to some reduction in perceived congestion)

This upward trend is most evident for sections of M6 running through Cheshire and Merseyside, contributing to the overall uplift here. (Nevertheless, M6 in Cheshire and Merseyside still delivers a poorer experience overall than Lancashire and Cumbria).



Issues with surface, presentation (litter) and signage also dampening overall experience on the M6

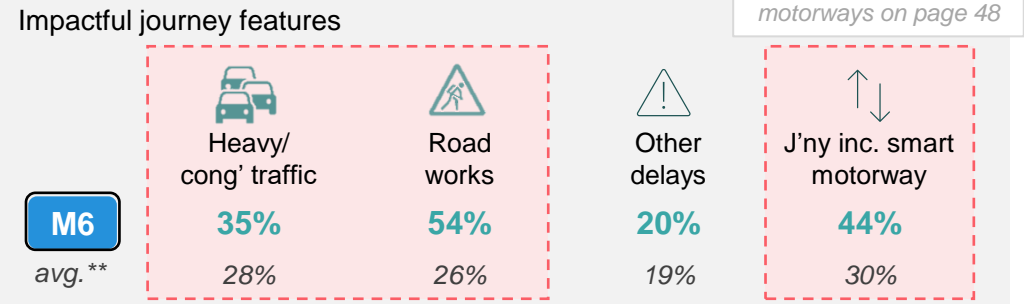
Other key metrics

	Journey time	M'gmt of roadworks	Feeling safe
M6	65%	44%	77%
avg.**	69%	47%	81%

Other aspects of experience*

	Road condition	Sign-age	Joining/leaving	M'gmt other delays
M6				

Despite some improvement, traffic continues to be heavier on the M6 than elsewhere; roadworks also perceived as particularly prevalent on this road, and nearly half of journeys use smart motorway. Together these factors are holding overall satisfaction back, again especially through Cheshire and Merseyside



Drivers' comments reflect these issues – notably with negative reference to smart motorways (either completed or under construction) in all comments about roadworks on the M6

Extremely busy... Took longer than expected for this part of my journey.

...you have to set off early because you know ...if there is any incident you will always get delayed.

The everlasting supposed upgrade to a smart motorway, always causes long tailbacks and ...parts [have a] poor surface

Road works caused by updating to smart motorway resulted in massive traffic jam ...we left ...at an earlier junction.

SRN users in the North West on M6 (485), Aug '21 – Jul '23; bi-annual results for overall satisfaction (100, 115, 123, 139). **Averages shown are the all-region result for all motorways.

* "Traffic lights" indicate how these users rate the range of measures within each of these topics (e.g. "Road condition" covers surface, lighting, markings, cats eyes, litter), compared to the all-region motorway average. Some sample sizes are smaller on some of these measures individually (e.g. lighting is only rated by those driving after dark), so we are presenting an overview of experience (which also takes into account free-text comments.). See pg 52 for detail

A very different context on the M53: the best performing motorway nationally, during this period

Users experiencing straightforward, free-flowing, uninterrupted journeys, helped by light traffic and little roadworks impact

Key metrics

	Overall sat'	Journey time	M'gmt of roadworks	Feeling safe
M53	85%	79%	Small sample size	85%
avg. **	71%	69%	47%	81%

Other aspects of experience*

Road condition	Signage	Joining/leaving	M'gmt other delays
			Small sample size

Impactful journey features

	M53	avg. **
Heavy/cong' traffic	11%	28%
Roadworks	14%	26%
Other delays	4%	19%

A majority (73%) of trips were for **leisure**, likely associated with more positive mindset and less critical timings (v. 65% avg. **)

Where drivers were satisfied with M53 journeys, two thirds explained this was due to a lack of hold-ups (vs 38% avg. ** who gave this rationale for satisfaction)

“ Steady flow of traffic. No road works or lane closures interrupting the journey ”

“ The motorway wasn't busy or congested and it was a very straight forward journey ”

Rare negative comments focus on occasional pockets of congestion and road surface condition (reflecting typical reasons for less positive journeys, nationwide)

“ Road was fairly quiet, but road surface leaves a lot to be desired ”

“ ...different each time ...stuck in traffic one journey or sail through the next. I get there when I get there; I was only shopping. ”

M65

An example of where some roads do not follow the overall trend for the North West – highlighting a need to keep up pressure on minimising delays wherever they appear and even where rare

Showcased in 2022's report as North West's best-performer, now overtaken by M53.

Satisfaction still above average (78%), but all measures of experience decreased a little from the second half of 2022 – with users a little more likely to mention congestion and delays (though not necessarily due to roadworks).

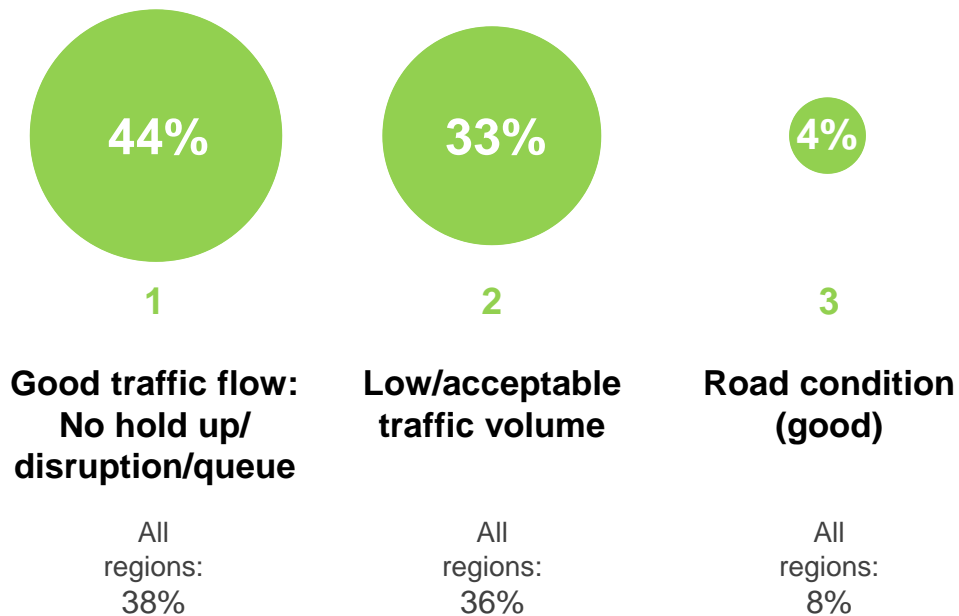
Understanding overall satisfaction in more detail



There are two main themes in the reasons users give for satisfactory journeys in the North West

Strategic road users in this region were asked **why** they were satisfied or dissatisfied with their journey, in their own words. We have quantified the key themes which arose using a random sample of responses.

Satisfaction: top reasons
(very/fairly satisfied, North West)
% mentioning topic



Other factors also impact on satisfaction for a minority, including:

Good flow 'despite' roadworks

Good/effective signage

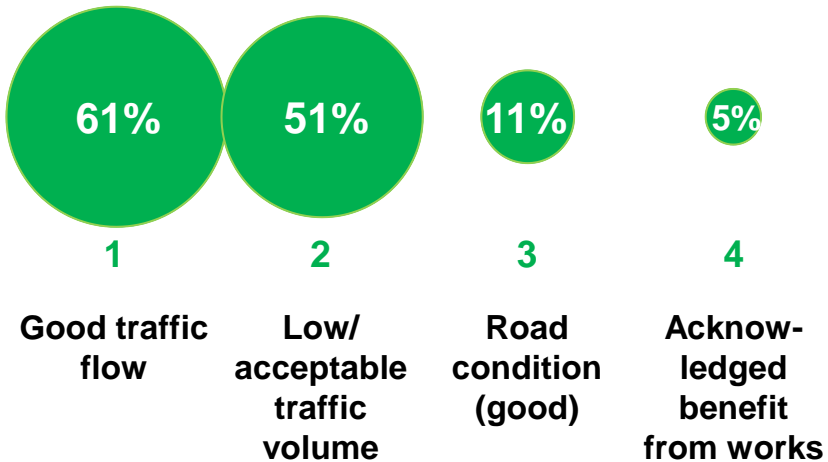
Good/effective lane provision

Appropriate/no speed restrictions

...and some also mention negative factors, which usually explain why they rated their journey as 'fairly' rather than 'very' satisfactory: see more on this on the next page.

Ultimately the absence of disruptions, or allowing continuous momentum, makes for **fully satisfactory** rather than simply 'ok' journeys

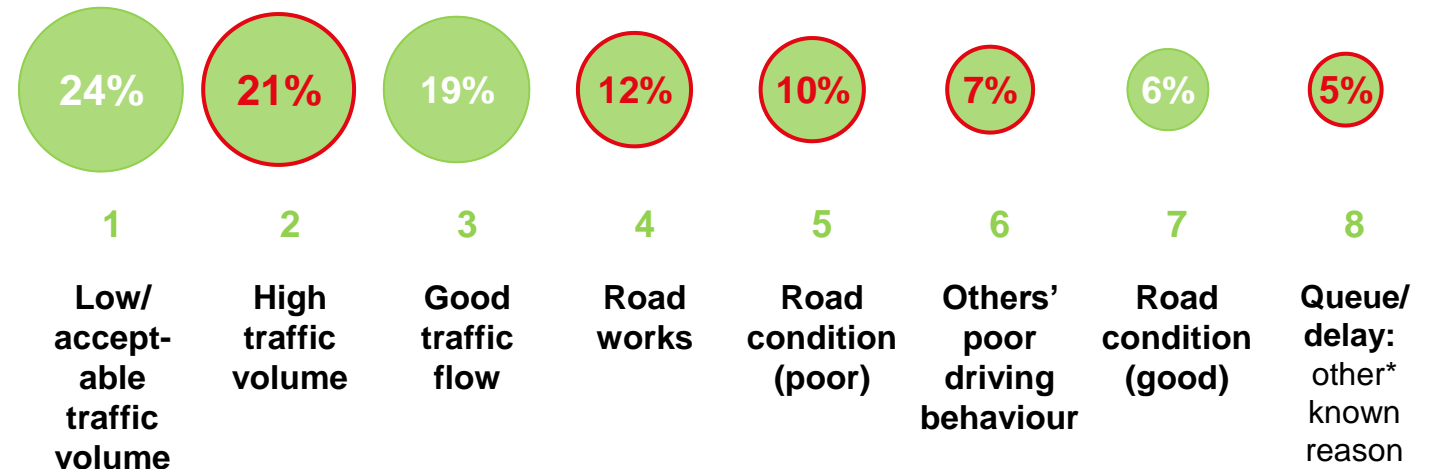
Very satisfied: top reasons
% mentioning topic



Plus:

- ✓ a **range of other factors relating to good management and features** of roads
- ✓ a **near-total absence of reported issues** like roadworks, congestion, poor upkeep/markings/signage, etc.

Fairly satisfied: top reasons
% mentioning topic



Plus a **range of other factors relating to poor management and features** of roads

It's worth acknowledging that those who are 'fairly satisfied' with SRN journeys often still experience some issues. So while most users are satisfied overall in the North West, could National Highways aim to increase the proportion who are very satisfied (currently around a third here, similar to most regions).

Findings on this page are at national level



In addition to absence of disruptions, very satisfactory journeys sometimes involve **appreciation for improvement works**; those who are only 'fairly' satisfied often have both **positive and negative aspects** to their journey

Very satisfied: Example comments (North West)

- “ Quiet. Good quality road surface. Sensible speed limits. ”
- “ Good motorway. No holdups. ”
- “ No average speed checks and no roadworks at the time, everything ran smoothly with cruise control on at 70mph. Not too much traffic at this time either ”
- “ Traffic moving smoothly. Fine day. Good road surface. ”
- “ No road works. No traffic jams. Clear signage ”
- “ [Road] in good condition, verges good, signage good, traffic light. ”
- “ Good road surface and traffic was steady. ”
- “ Traffic was flowing freely even though there was a large amount of traffic. ”
- “ Busy traffic conditions but kept moving at a steady speed ”
- “ It was fairly quiet and the road has recently been redone with new asphalt, so felt like a smooth journey. ”

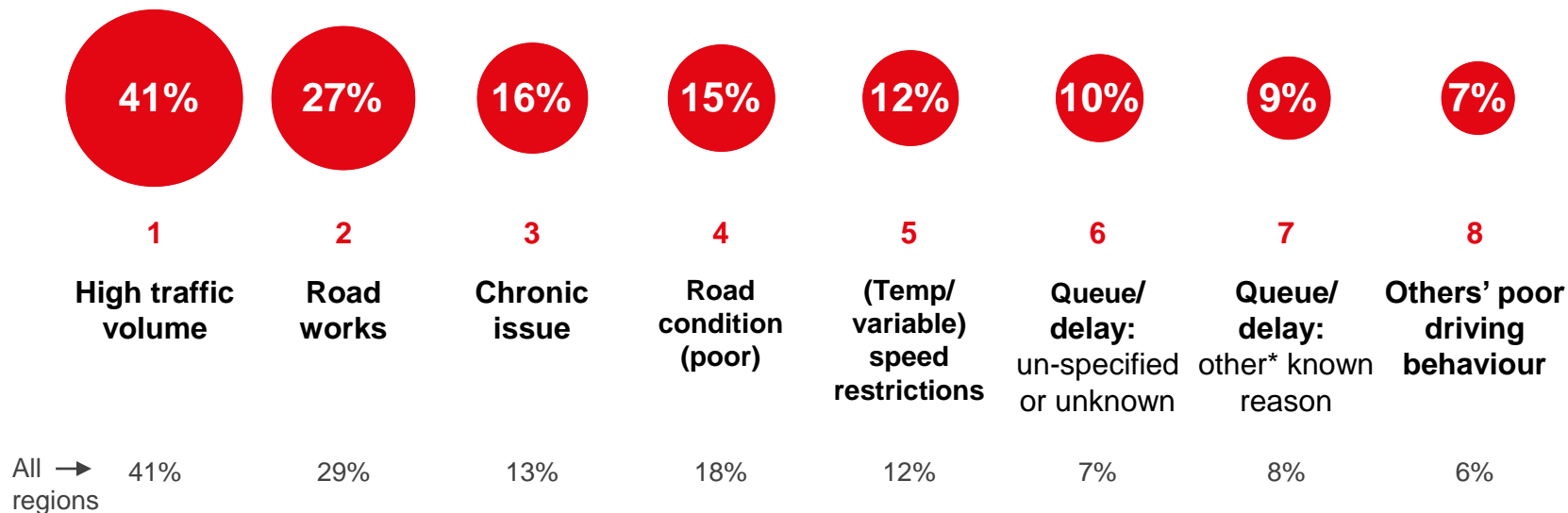
Fairly satisfied: Example comments (North West)

- “ Always queuing on the slip road to get on motorway as this joins the outside lane. After half a mile the traffic tends to move better. ”
- “ Cars not filtering to the left when the lane was clear ”
- “ Frustrating going at 50mph when roadworks were not taking place ”
- “ Traffic free flowing, road surface generally good but there are some pot holes appearing. ”
- “ It can get very busy at the end of the motorway at Mottram side. Cars push in and it can be chaos. ”
- “ The road was quite clear and people were generally driving well. A few instances of lane hogging which made maintaining speed slightly difficult but overall it was easy and didn't add any time to my journey ”
- “ No road works, small delay on part of journey due to traffic accident but other than that no disruptions ”
- “ Some road surfaces were not ideal but the traffic level was reasonable. ”
- “ It was busy, but to be expected at holiday time. Long section of 50 mph and narrow lanes, annoying as this work has been going on for months and months and months and doubt there will be any visible improvement. ”

Perception of heavy traffic and presence of roadworks are commonest reasons for dissatisfaction in the North West, along with poor road upkeep, variable speed restrictions and other delays – and many users frustrated with ongoing nature of these issues

Strategic road users were asked **why** they were satisfied or dissatisfied with their journey, in their own words. We have quantified the key themes which arose, from a random sample of their responses.

Dissatisfaction: top reasons (very/fairly dissatisfied, North West) % mentioning topic




Dissatisfaction: other reasons (very/fairly dissatisfied) % mentioning topic

	North West	All regions
Too few lanes/closures	6%	6%
Dislike of/issues with smart motorway	5%	3%
Other	17%	28%

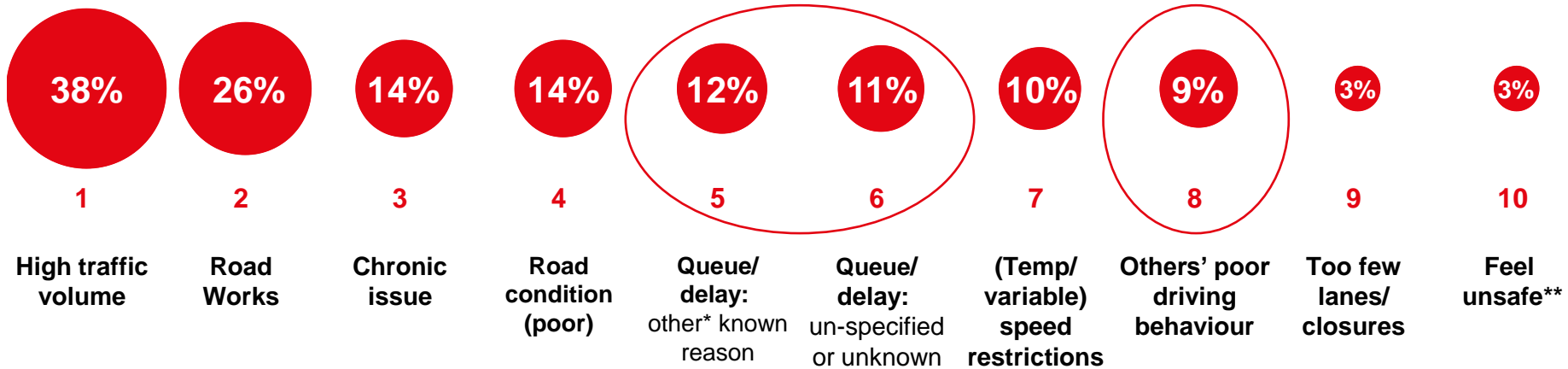
Base: random sample of those giving a rationale for overall satisfaction rating Aug 22-Jul 23 – dissatisfied, North West (101), all regions (303)

* i.e. not (only) roadworks, speed restrictions / traffic volume; includes accidents, stranded vehicles, debris, and traffic management infrastructure like roundabouts, traffic lights, etc., for example

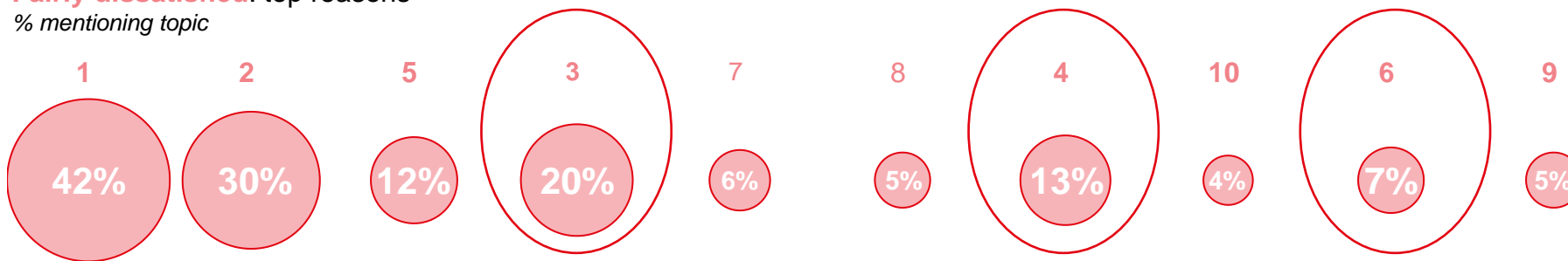
While perception of heavy traffic and **roadworks** are most common reasons for poor journeys, **when other delays happen, they are associated with more pronounced dissatisfaction**, along with some other differences between fairly and very poor journeys

Findings on this page are at national level 

Very dissatisfied: top reasons
% mentioning topic



Fairly dissatisfied: top reasons
% mentioning topic



Other measures within the survey confirm that disruption for other reasons, when they happen, can be more **impactful** than that caused by roadworks:

For journeys reported to be affected by roadworks, 24% are dissatisfactory, compared to 33% with congestion, and 34% delayed for other reasons – especially accidents and breakdowns.

All of this suggests that planned disruptions which can be managed and informed about (like roadworks) can be somewhat tolerated, but congestion and delays, including for unknown or (perceived) avoidable reasons, can feel unacceptable. Information doesn't solve, but can help to mitigate, these scenarios.

Base: random sample of those giving a rationale for overall satisfaction rating Aug 22-Jul 23, all regions – very dissatisfied (90), fairly dissatisfied (212)

* i.e. not (only) roadworks, speed restrictions / traffic volume; includes accidents, stranded vehicles, debris, roundabouts, traffic lights, etc., for example

** where feeling safe is explicitly mentioned; however, safety is also likely to be implied when dissatisfaction is caused by other factors

The strength of feeling evident in 'very' dissatisfied motorists' comments is likely indicative of the negative impact poor journeys can have on a person's day. Such experiences can also aggravate broader negative opinions about society and the way public services are run

Very dissatisfied: Example comments (North West)

- “ ...very slow drivers, often going no more than 30 miles per hour on roads that you can not overtake safely. Roads liable to bad flooding ”
- “ Road works ...resulted in massive traffic jam and tail backs... we left the motorway at an earlier junction. ”
- “ There are constant roadworks on a "smart motorway" system that has done nothing but made travel more inconvenient and slow at the cost of billions of pounds. ”
- “ Traffic very heavy. There are too many cars on the road today due to vast increases in population. ”
- “ Congestion at crawling pace over the Trafford Centre flyover bridge ”
- “ Volume of traffic, bumper to bumper all the way ...then saw an accident closing 3 of 4 lanes... Took over 2 hours to get ...about 8 miles. ”
- “ Road works that are unnecessary at Skippool and potholes on the rest. ”
- “ The quality of the road surface in general is appalling on the whole length of the A590. Considering the cost of Road Tax ...it's nothing short of a disgrace ”

Fairly dissatisfied: Example comments (North West)

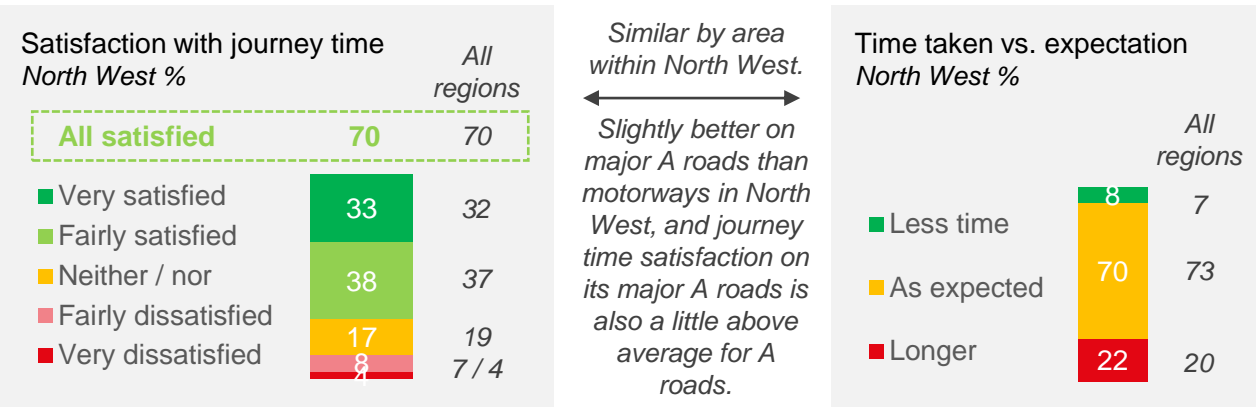
- “ Roadworks that have been ongoing for over a year, unsure if motorway was open ”
- “ Continuing road works restricting most of journey to 50mph ”
- “ Too much litter in the central reservation ... the variable speed limit signs ...changed too often... ”
- “ Road surfaces are not always great ”
- “ Not enough dual carriageways and limited passing places ”
- “ Incredibly busy, poor standard of driving from other motorists, poor visibility ”
- “ Surface did not cope with the spray levels ”
- “ Extremely busy, queuing at times. Took longer than expected for this part of my journey. ”
- “ Lengthy delay encountered at Switch Island (M57/A59) ”
- “ Deep and long potholes, some unavoidable, causing very hard hits to wheels and suspension. ”
- “ The Manchester Airport area was very congested ”
- “ Because you have to set off early because you know you will be delayed at some point. If there is any incident you will always get delayed. ”

Journey time

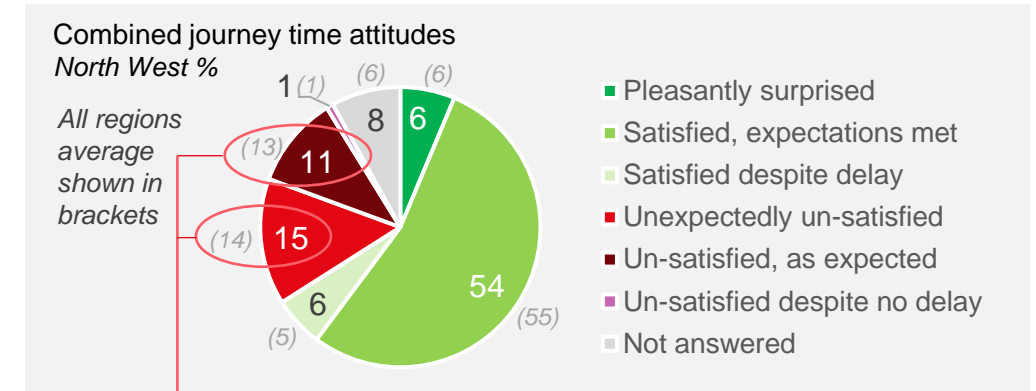


Users' experience of journey times on the SRN in the North West

Satisfaction with journey time in the North West is now similar to the average (and has overtaken it through 2023), though a fifth of journeys take longer than expected



Taking journey time satisfaction and expectation together highlights that not being satisfied is sometimes unexpected, but is sometimes linked to longer term frustration with road provision or management



Punctuality is overtly important for **55%** North West journeys (vs. 56% for all regions)



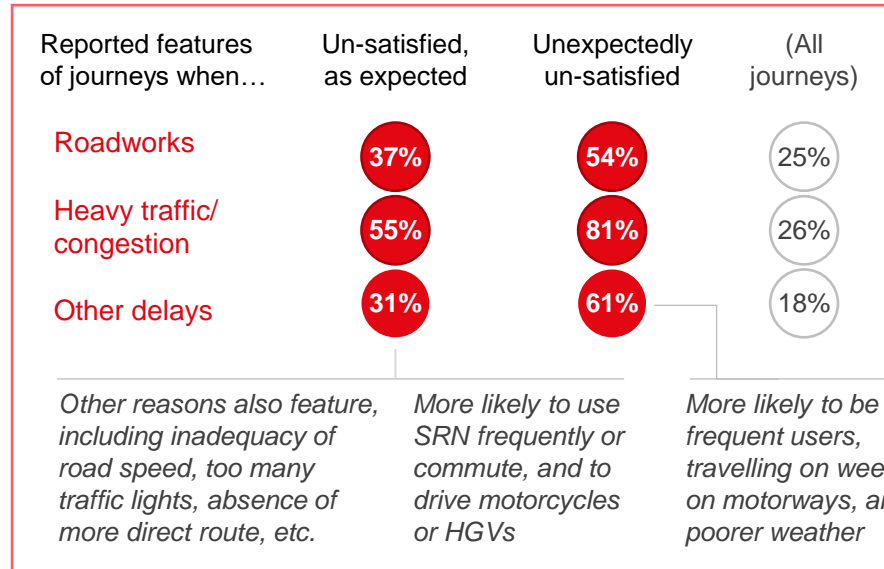
62% set off early for these journeys (vs. 58% on average and higher than all other regions)

Where punctuality really matters, this is typically for work journeys, especially outward, morning peak journeys, and more so for professional drivers.

But while people typically set off early for morning peak commuting journeys, this isn't necessarily the case for professional drivers – perhaps where allowing contingency is less possible.

Advance information on delays is vital to empower those who can, to set off earlier. Additionally, work to improve and protect journey times – for both planned and unplanned disruption, and more systemic delays – will benefit all, including those who do not have this option.

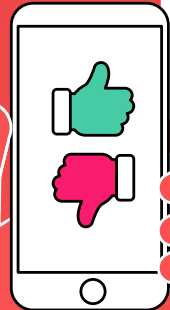
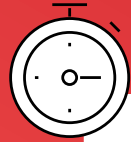
Base: Journey time satisfaction: all answering, Aug '22 – Jul '23, North West, (1,382), all regions (9,056)
 Time vs expectations: all answering, Aug '22 – Jul '23, North West, (1,288), all regions (8,530)
 Combined attitudes: all SRN users surveyed, Aug '22 – Jul '23, North West, (1,387), all regions (9,091)



Findings in this box are at national level

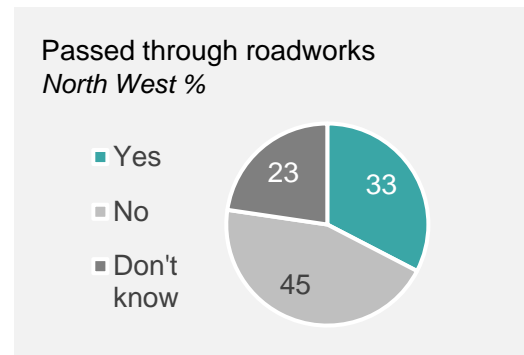


Experience of roadworks



SRN users' experience of roadworks in the North West

Perceived prevalence of roadworks is high in the North West, with a third of journeys affected (though decreasing in early 2023 vs 2022)



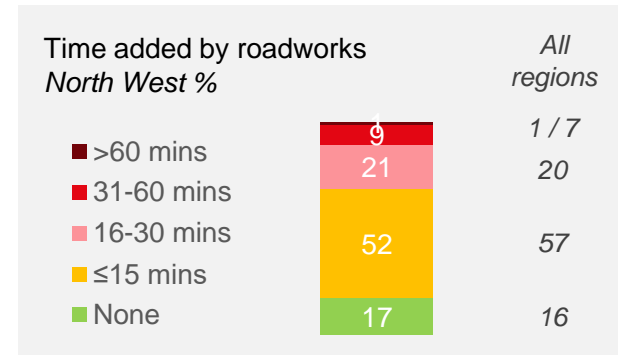
Compares to all-regions average of 25% that passed through roadworks

(North West region is second highest after Yorkshire and North East, for this)

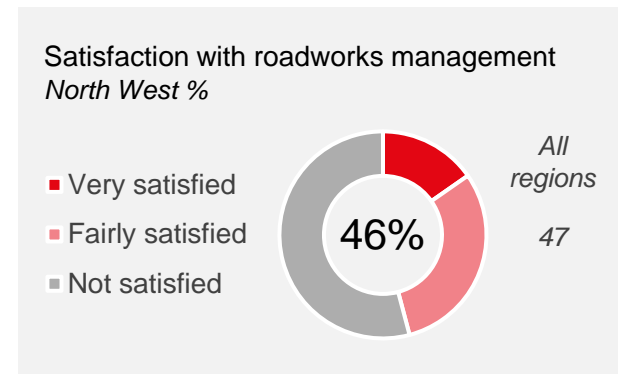
In particular, roadworks are felt to be very prevalent in the North West...

- **On motorways – 35%** motorway journeys passed through works (vs. 26% all-region motorway average)
- **In Lancashire and Cumbria, where 42%** journeys passed through works (vs. 25% all-region average)

On average they typically add a similar extra time to journeys as in most other regions



Less than half of those affected are satisfied with roadworks management



Advance warning increases satisfaction with how roadworks are managed, and the earlier the better (though satisfaction is low overall despite this)

Findings in this box are at national level

Satisfaction with roadworks management, among those who were.... (%)	Unaware	Aware after setting off (not before)	Aware before setting off
Satisfied	39	48	49
(Very satisfied)	(7)	(13)	(16)

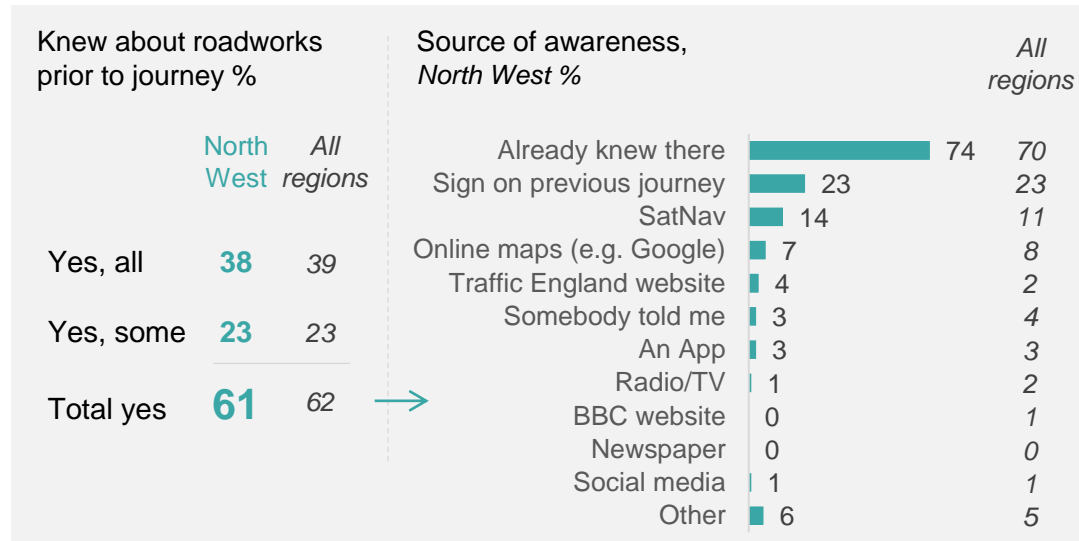
Inevitably it is difficult to truly satisfy users when their journey is disrupted, but other factors in the way works are managed can exacerbate this experience.

Comments from users who are dissatisfied with roadwork management highlight themes including:

- Perception of unreasonable impact:
 - Excessive number of encounters with roadworks
 - Unnecessary length of road affected
 - Excessive duration
- Little evidence of work taking place in practice
- Unclear benefit (or explicit disagreement with purpose, especially relating to smart motorways)
- Speed restrictions, especially multiple variations and narrowed lanes
- Poor lighting or signage

Finding out about roadworks in the North West

Two thirds of those affected were aware of roadworks in advance of the journey, with previous exposure the main source of awareness



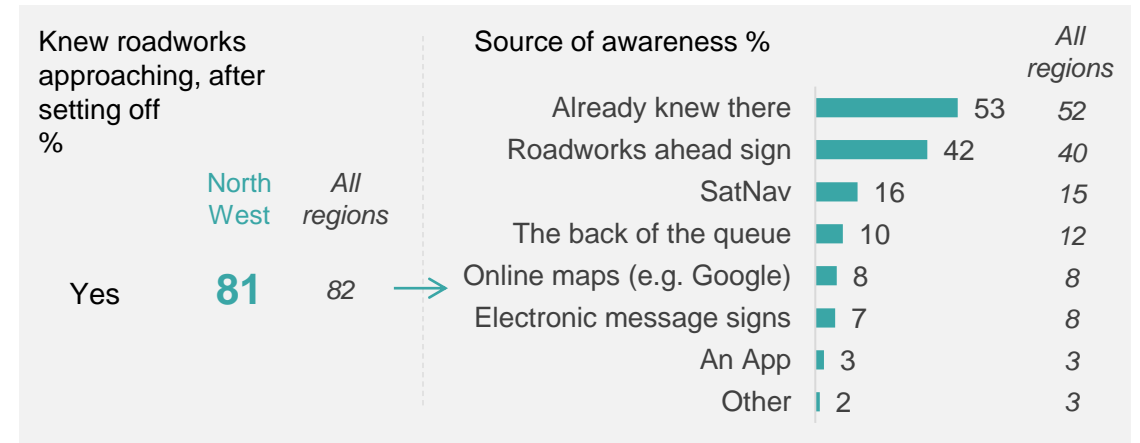
Reflecting this reliance on previous exposure, advance knowledge of roadworks is associated with more frequent usage, especially commuters and professional drivers. **Those making less frequent journeys, typically for leisure, are less informed.**

Likely linked to this, people are less informed when travelling off peak and at weekends, and in sunnier weather or, conversely, after dark.

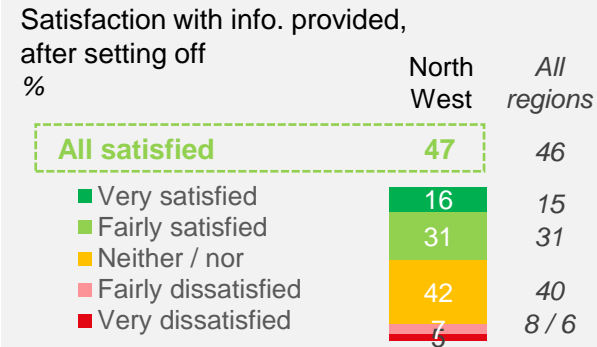
Can more be done in periods of higher leisure travel to target users less likely to know about the roadworks?

Can more be done around road-side signage visibility, especially in the dark?

Most were aware they were approaching roadworks as they made the journey: own experience again important, along with road signage



And in this context, in-journey information is satisfactory to fewer than half of those who were aware of approaching roadworks



Information from any source – before reaching the back of the queue – aids satisfaction here.

Nevertheless, as highlighted on the previous page, experience of the roadworks themselves is only partly influenced by having prior or in-journey information; further reasons are given on the next page.

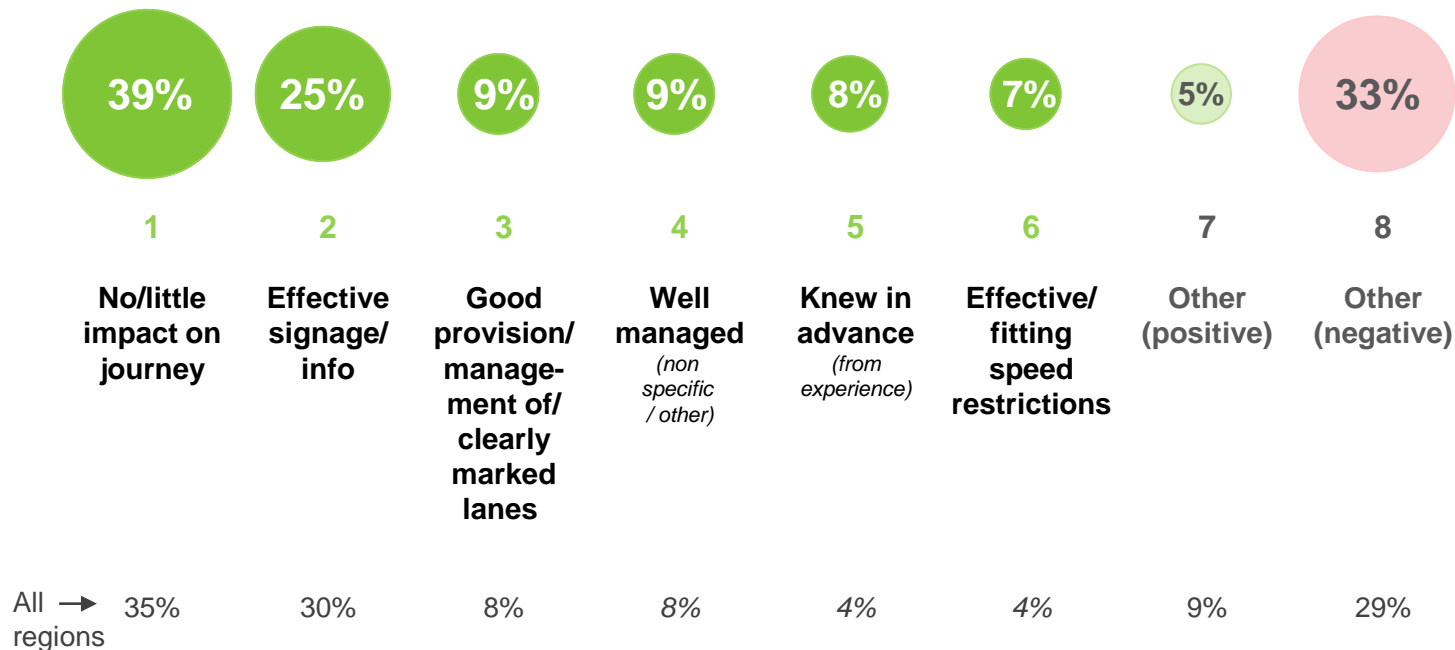
When SRN users in the North West are satisfied with roadworks management, it's typically due to little material impact, and/or that they feel informed

Strategic road users were asked **why** they were satisfied or dissatisfied with roadworks management, in their own words. We have quantified the key themes which arose, from a random sample of their responses.

Satisfaction with roadworks management: top reasons

(very/fairly satisfied)

North West, % mentioning topic



More negative features of roadworks management are typically associated with being fairly, rather than very, satisfied with it.

In particular North West drivers mention...

- Perception that **no/little work is taking place**, and restrictions/consequential delays feel unjustified
- The duration or geographical spread feels **excessive**
- That **signage and/or advance warning was insufficient or poor quality**
- **Poor behaviour** or poor compliance with instructions/restrictions by other drivers

Base: random sample of those giving a rationale for satisfaction with roadworks Aug '22 – Jul '23
North West (92), all regions (203)



More on what makes roadworks communication effective

Feeling informed certainly makes a difference

I was able to factor the possible delay ...with the aid of Google maps. This allowed me set aside enough time ...By leaving early enough I was prepared for possible delays on route

They're taking longer than the completion date originally advertised, but I knew that so 'fairly satisfied'

Feeling informed is mentioned as a reason for good roadworks experience by about half of those who are very satisfied (and features for around a quarter of those who are fairly satisfied)

Key features of communications where drivers have felt effectively informed, include

(in order of importance, based on the relative frequency at which they are mentioned):



Timing

Sufficient notice

Well sign posted, plenty of time to change lanes

Given lots of notice roadwork were coming up [and] cars flowed well

By reducing the speeds a mile out it helped calm the traffic



Content

Detail and volume of information

Lots of signs about the roadworks, what they are doing, and when they aim to be finished. ...[with] plenty of warning so everyone didn't slam on the brakes and create more traffic

There [were] start and finish dates on signs

...balanced with clarity *[The roadworks] were easy to understand*

...and accuracy
(though note that several comments about accuracy are made with an implication that this isn't always the case)

Signage was clear and updated regularly

Delay time shown on electronic signs was pretty accurate



Channel

Multiple touchpoints/repeated notices can be useful

Messages on gantries plus cones and signs

There was advanced warning on overhead signs on M4 before approaching and the speed reduction signals helped to prevent accidents.

Including via wrap-around comms via other channels (for example, local news)

Clear signage and informed prior to work's beginning

...providing they are consistent
(see following)



...and some of the ways information can be improved further

Even among those who were satisfied overall with management of roadworks, several pointers were highlighted around how to communicate more effectively, more often:

Detail of information/content

Timings, duration, distance affected

<i>No indication how long the roadworks will continue for.</i>	<i>It would have been helpful to know the distance the roadworks lasted for</i>	<i>There were signs saying the A14 was closed, yet we were able to access the road. A time as to when the A14 is actually closed would be preferred.</i>
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How to drive through the roadworks

Where (lanes/exits), speed, etc

<i>Speed limit changes from 50mph to 40mph to 30mph in a short space of time/distance and no obvious information about why we were asked to reduce speed</i>	<i>The signs were a bit limited and the warning for the junction I wanted could have been clearer</i>
--	---

Purpose/benefit

Note that some drivers have a strong interest in and scrutinise road improvement initiatives – and they may or may not agree with them – information about the purpose of roadworks can alleviate frustration, but making information easily available about the rationale can also be useful to explain reasons fairly and clearly

...it should improve things longer term which is completely needed

...they also don't tell you what the roadworks are for

Sufficient notice and volume of information throughout and around journeys

Would appreciate notification further back so could ...detour if they were a long delay

I didn't see enough warnings on the road. Google maps told me more

I joined from one of the roads so had no warning about how long they would last for / delays would take...

No radio coverage

Better / earlier signage – we could have avoided the roadworks

...but need to balance detail and volume against potential for clutter and confusion

Lots of signs and cones along with new road markings were a lot to take in at once

Road signs ...but bollards were still being put out so unclear as to what was happening.

...positioning, size and lighting of signage could help more

Signs not well lit and difficult to absorb all information

Text on boards could be larger

...as can plain English

Often roadworks state a junction number or name, and I would find it easier if they specified the city / town / village so I know where they are

→ Consistency: of content, of provision of the information

Heard on the radio that the road had been closed, but it was open on our side with just one lane running. It was a bit confusing throughout our journey if our side was closed or not.

...there is always room for improvement. I.e. electronic information signs – some give information then one or two don't.

Sometimes too many signs in one area. Then inconsistency.

Some other examples of how roadworks might be delivered most effectively for SRN users



Consider communicating in a way that suggests dialogue and mutual understanding

Drivers are often rational and understand, rationally, that roadworks need to happen... can signage and other comms/information tap into this with appropriate language, and explanation of purpose?

I understand roads need fixing or improving sometimes, this is inevitable.

...important work required, good to see it being done

...while acknowledging the impact of disruption on drivers

Understandably road works need to happen, I do feel however that they seem to take too long to finish.

...they are something that needs to be done but they seem to be taking too long - over 13 years...

...and humanising the workers themselves

...workers doing their best to finish on time

...they seem to be working efficiently out in all weather

...sensible speed reduction ... Gives a safe working environment.



Can more be done to improve compliance?

Other drivers were the problem, not pulling into the correct lane when they were given notification, which there was adequate signage [for]

Lane jumpers who race down the wrong lane then barge their way in.

Note that poor driver behaviour is often mentioned in context of restrictions being in place where roadworks are not visibly underway

Because no one seems to be working and despite the speed limits lorries continually bully car drivers to go faster



As well as controlling information clutter for live roadworks, can unnecessary signage and road markings be minimised, wherever they exist?

Old road markings still visible - difficulty ensuring we were in the up to date lane

Very congested area ...Used to the layout now but not very clear with the use of cones everywhere



Consider variation in the way restrictions are imposed

For example, rules for certain vehicles and variation in traffic control measures by time of day

Given drivers are coming to expect variations on smart roads might it be reasonable that they should also expect more nuanced, reactive and conditions-based management of disruption more generally, including through roadworks?

While no one is working on that side of the road, at the moment, all the lanes have been opened and the 50mph speed limit lifted.

Roadworks are just a fact of life, but they could restrict which vehicles use which lanes, particularly on the long climb up hill

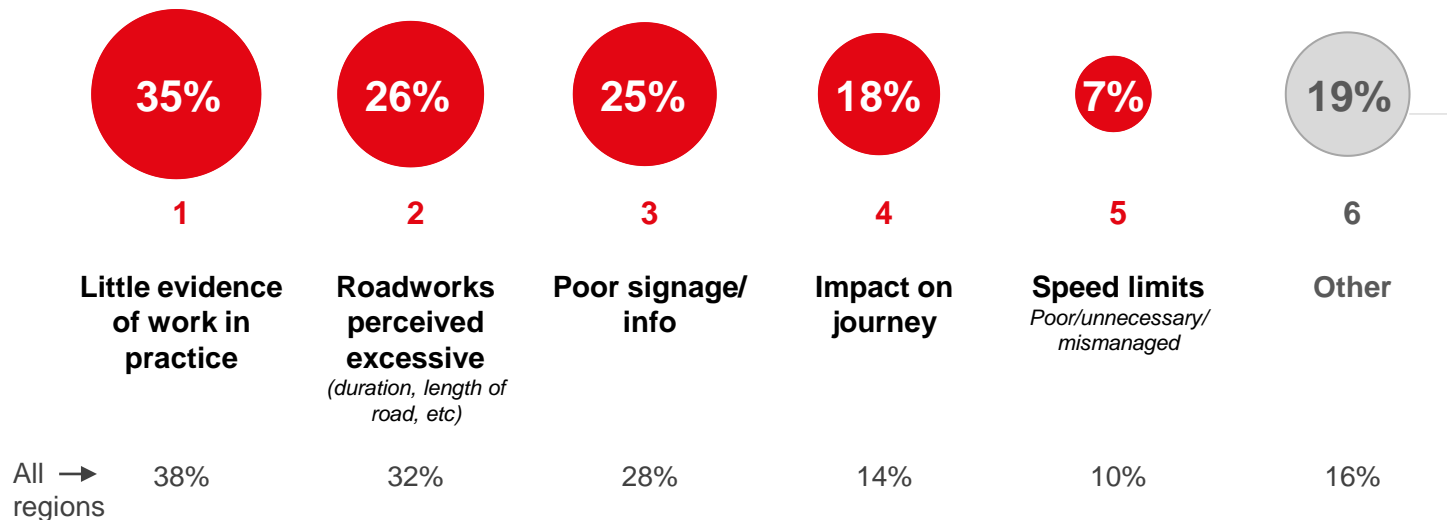
Reduced speed limit at night for no reason to 40mph as there is not a lot of traffic

Dissatisfaction with roadworks management usually driven by apparent absence of actual work, signage issues, and a general perception of there being too much, for too long

Strategic road users were asked **why** they were satisfied or dissatisfied with roadworks management, in their own words. We have quantified the key themes which arose, from a random sample of their responses.

Findings in this box are at national level 

Dissatisfaction with roadworks management: top reasons (very/fairly dissatisfied) % mentioning topic



While still a key factor in dissatisfaction, perception of excessiveness is a little less prominent in the North West, relative to some other regions (notably the East, Midlands and M25 region)

Even greater perception of **excessiveness** and **'other' issues** are the key differentiators between being **very** rather than **fairly dissatisfied** with roadwork management

Including:

- Traffic management measures not fit for purpose given weather conditions
- Cones/signs knocked over, misplaced, obstructed
- Construction debris on road
- Navigation confusing
- Unhappy with strategic decision making
- Inappropriate timing/time of year
- Cynicism that restrictions are really about fine collection/traffic calming
- Poor value for tax-payer money

Base: random sample of those giving a rationale for dissatisfaction with roadworks, Aug '22-Jul '23
North West (57), all regions (213), all regions very dissatisfied (112), fairly dissatisfied (125)



Some of the frustration of roadworks in motorists' own words:

Works apparently not taking place

There seem to be traffic lights being put up and left for days for no apparent reason, or for a mornings work

Roadworks for repairs that have been in place for more than 12 months with no progress made

Large sections of the A1 reduced to 40 mph. No visible work taking place, and replacing old crash barriers with the same new barriers, seems a complete waste.

Roadworks supposedly, although nothing to be seen.

Perception of excessiveness

Takes an hour ...due to ...repairs going on on central reservation. Going on for 3 or 4 years now.

15 miles of lane closure for 200yds of actual working carried out.

...major works from last 4 years never finishes...

...poorly designed roadworks that trap drivers in endless cone restrictions - due for central barrier upgrades - that could be done with a 500m 'rolling - unit - with special equipment designed for the job.

Poor information provision

Roadworks coming off A1(M) [did not have] clear signage and [I] nearly missed turn off. Also work entrances looked like a turn off

Some of the information signs were physically knocked over...

Didn't know for sure where it shut, or if it was shut. The signs are normally wrong anyway

The road works said there was to be closures between 9pm and 6am which was wrong

Road closures notified too late to take alternative route

Personal/unreasonable impact

...frustrating with the number of ...traffic hold ups where you see work is not even actively being done - Highways control doesn't seem to care that drivers are inconvenienced with road blocks

Roadworks meant down to one lane for part of journey, it meant that I arrived later than wanted for work

...the bollards and lights are challenging. It makes me anxious...

Sometimes they don't even ...tell us road work is ongoing. ...you get to your exit and it's blocked so you have to drive all the way to the next exit and return back.

Frustration with speed limits

60mph for no reason at Reading roadworks

Low speed limit (20mph) which elsewhere would have been 40-50mph instead for similar work

Too many speed restrictions for roadworks that seemed finished.

Roadworks limiting to one lane for no obvious reason and very slow speed limits which change regularly again with no reason

...there are still speed restrictions of 60mph. The roadworks have gone, yet we still have these restrictions

Other

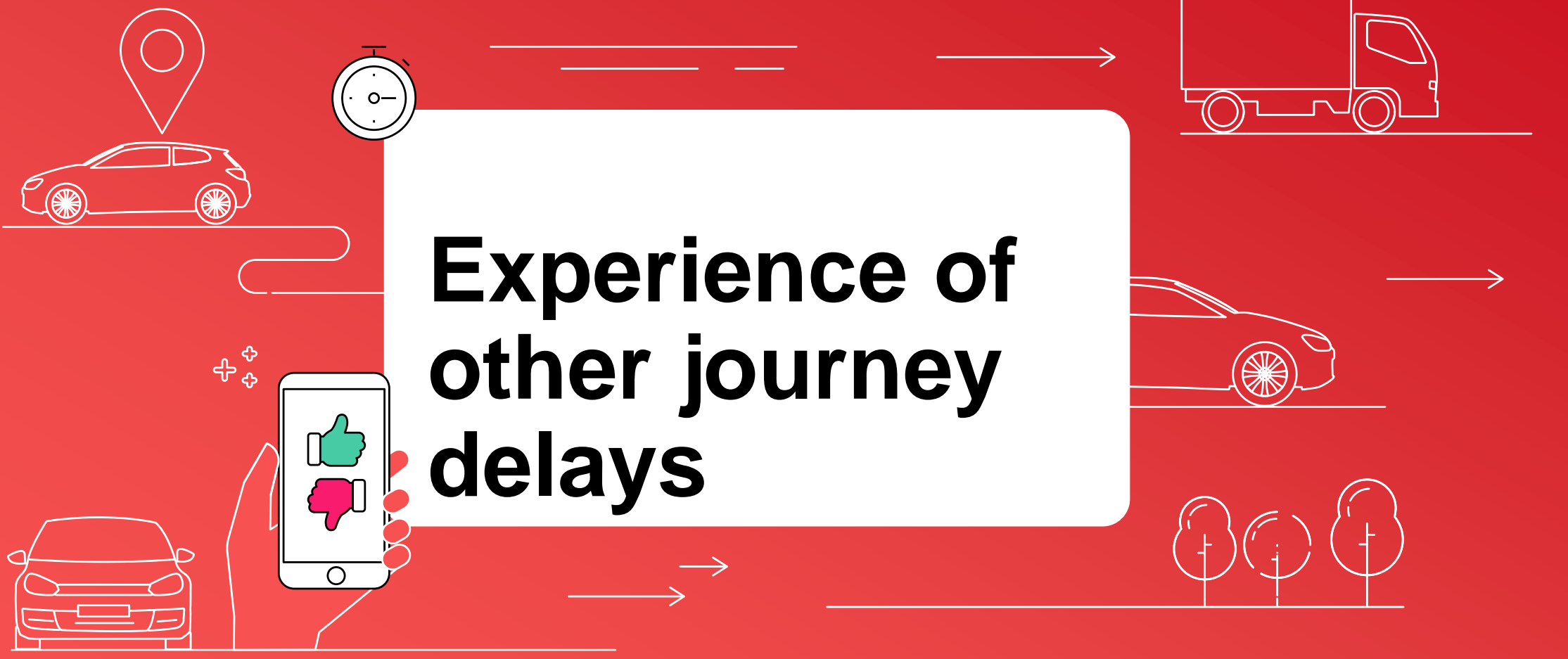
The works ...the lanes are extremely narrow, some vehicles drift in and out of the lanes next to them despite the 50mph restriction.

Badly planned roadworks, reducing the dual carriageway to a single track at the exact point that an exit backs on so that carriage[way] backs up...

Unsafe to drive through with the lanes being too narrow.

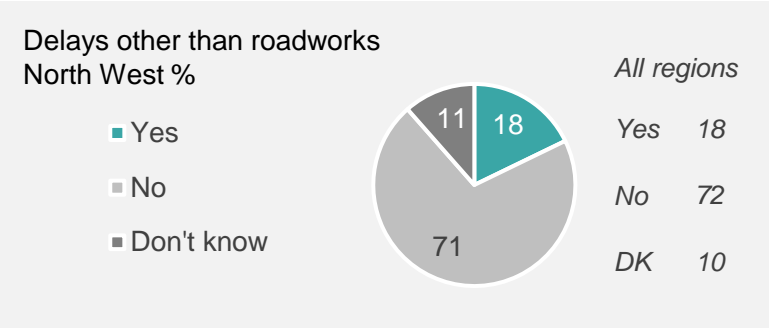
Also rubbish from construction on road made a driver stop and caused congestion.

Experience of other journey delays



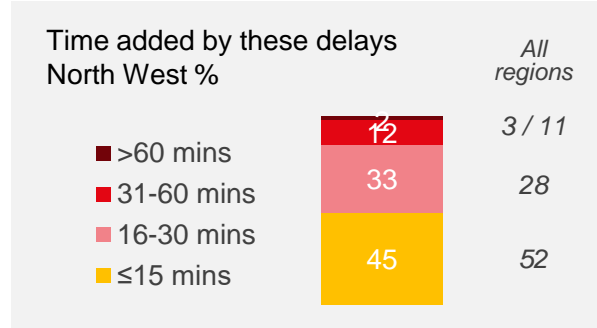
Users' experience of other journey disruption in the North West

Relatively fewer journeys were delayed for other (non-roadworks) reasons



Similar pattern for motorways and major A roads in the North West, but delays slightly more common in Cheshire and Merseyside (19%) than Lancashire and Cumbria (13%).

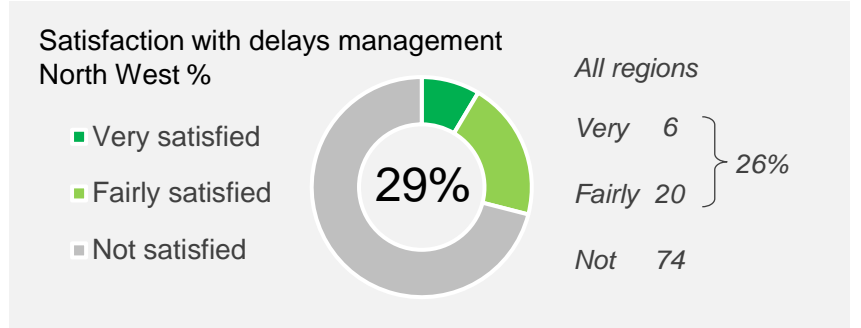
But these delays are typically longer than for roadworks



Delays on motorways typically a little longer than on major A roads.

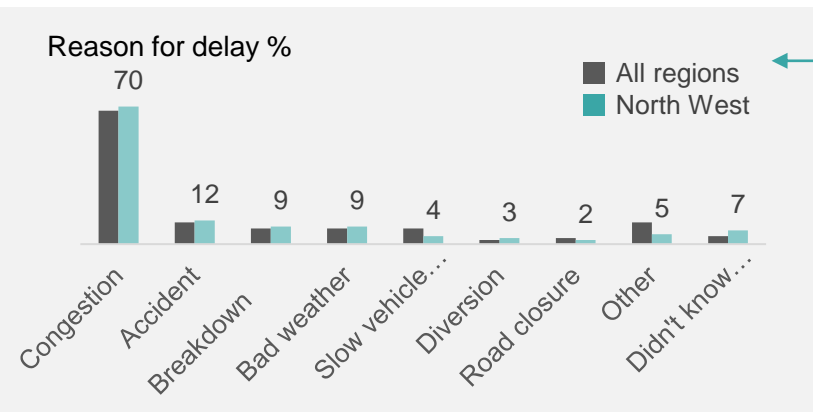
Sample sizes too small to analyse differences by area within the North West.

...and less than a third of those affected are satisfied with their management



Satisfaction with delay handling is typically a little stronger on motorways than major A roads.

Sample sizes too small to analyse differences by area within the North West.



The reasons for delays follow a similar pattern to the all-region average, though **congestion is reported to be experienced a little more often as a reason for delays in the North West than in most other regions.**

...indeed, despite some reduction since 2021, the North West is still one of the areas with the highest reported congestion (particularly in Cheshire and Merseyside as highlighted earlier in this report)

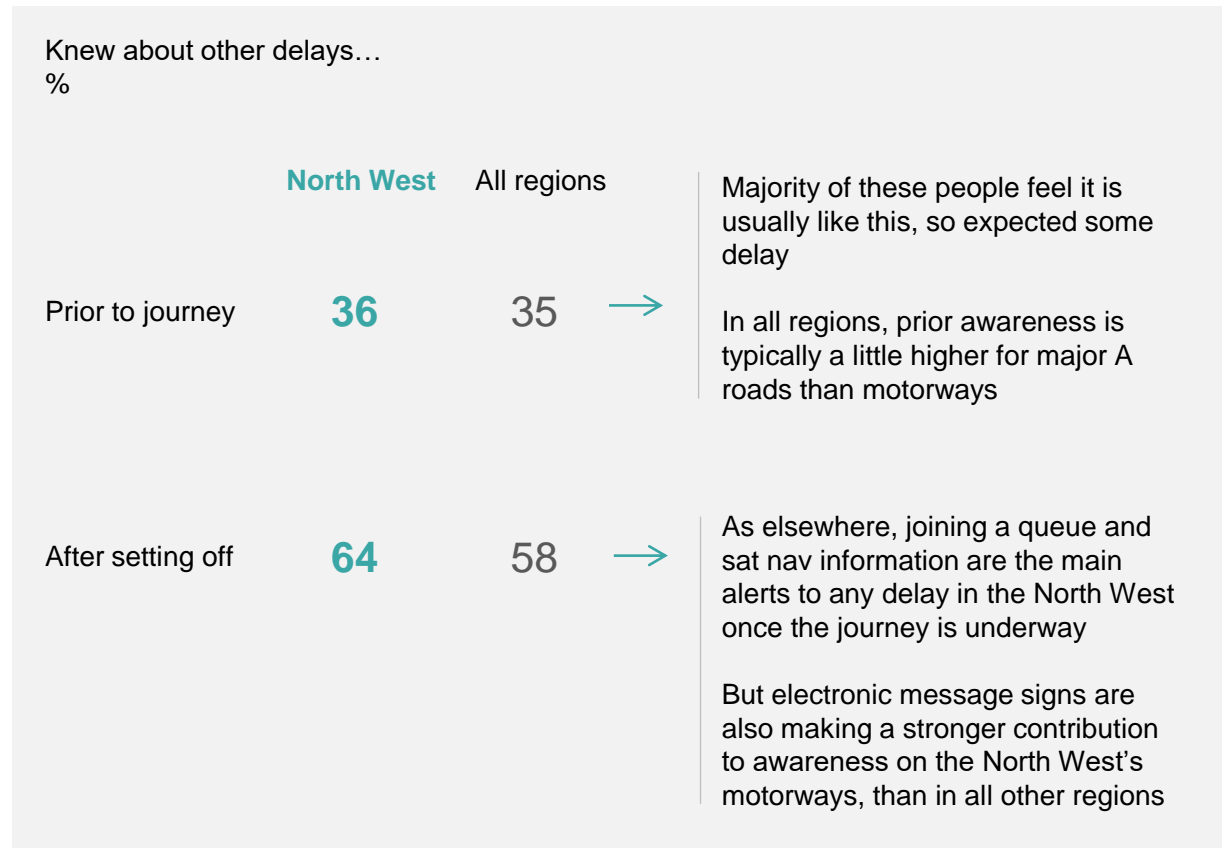
Level of traffic during journey was felt to be heavy/congested



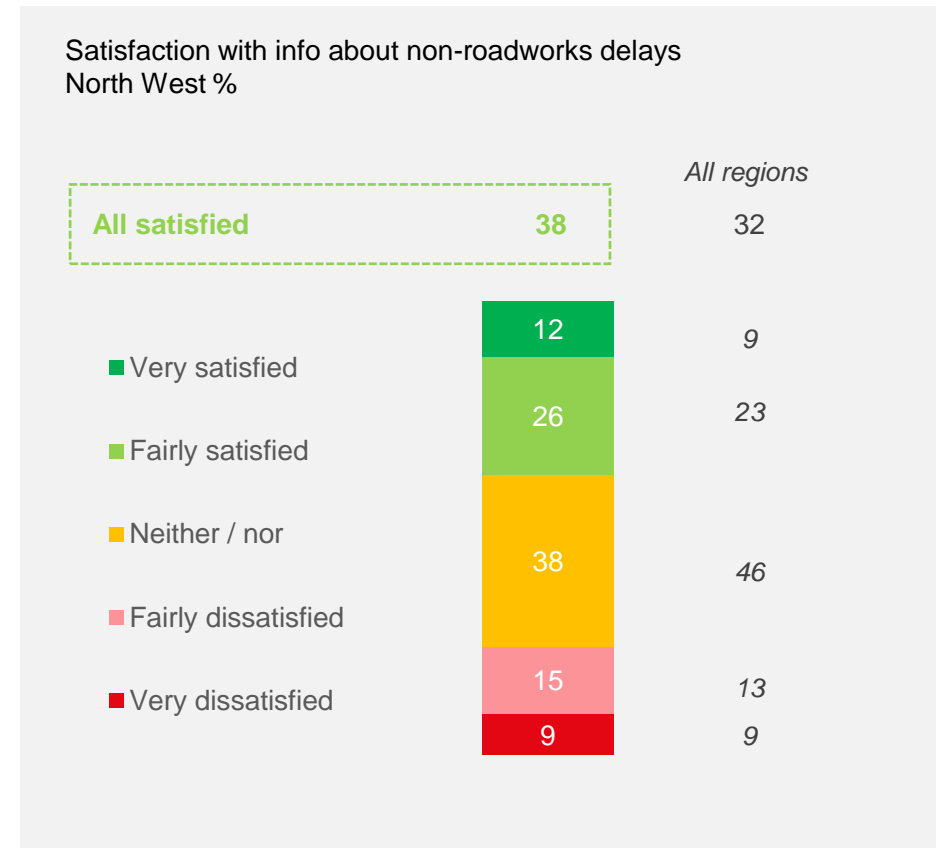
vs 25% on average, and along with the Midlands and M25 region as the three regions reported as most congested

Finding out about other types of delay in the North West

Just over a third of those affected by other delays (non-roadworks) were aware ahead of the journey, and around two thirds after setting off



...all leading to low levels of satisfaction with delay-related information (albeit higher than average)



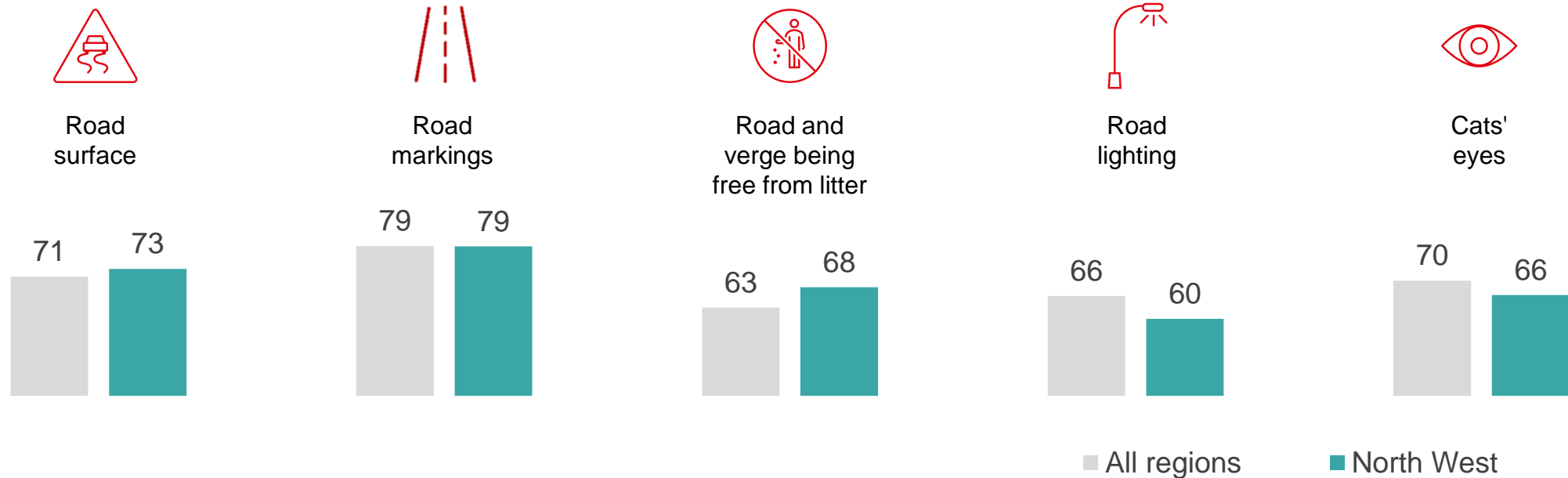
Base: All affected by delays other than roadworks in the North West, Aug '22 – Jul '23 (217)

Day to day functioning of SRN



Most are satisfied with road markings, but typically less so with other aspects of road condition. Lighting and cats' eyes rated less well in North West than elsewhere.

Rating of road condition
% very/fairly satisfied, North West vs all-region average



Base: Road surface/marking/litter, Aug '22 – Jul '23, all regions (7,694-8,967), North West (1,193-1,377)
Lighting/cats eyes', among those travelling after dark, Aug '22 – Jul '23, all regions (1,542-1,699), North West (233-256)

What are the issues with lighting?

Findings on this page are at national level



Recap: when we asked for comments in users' own words,

Lighting, cats' eyes and road markings were mentioned as a reason for dissatisfactory journeys, by 2% of those who were dissatisfied overall:

Not one of the bigger issues, but important to some

At the very least, drivers often feel uneasy in these scenarios:

“ I don't like driving in the dark, especially at the end of the journey when I am not familiar with the roads ”

“ Lack of overhead lighting makes a very difficult drive ”

“ It was very dark and therefore a bit stressful in the rain ”

Most common complaint is simply insufficient lighting

“ The lack of lighting after dark on the A47 is dangerous as there are deep ditches either side of the road ”

“ Lighting poor. Road markings poor. Road drainage poor. Cats eyes non-existent ”

“ The roads were dark, street lights were there but the lights were not on after night... ”

“ The A3 goes from brightly lit at Wisley to no lighting at all further on. ”

“ Some sections unlit, would feel safer with lighting ”

“ ...motorway is very dark far away from international standards ”

But some other themes also arise in users' comments:

Poor lighting is **especially noticeable or impactful in context of roadworks** (including being too bright) – **which are experienced more frequently in the North West than elsewhere**

“ Traffic, narrow lanes, poor lighting, slow speed limit ”

“ Road work light blinding vision ”

“ ... there was a lot of spray, lorries, road works and some of the way was in darkness, no lights on motorway ”

....or poor weather

“ In the rain and dark it's difficult to see ”

“ Bad weather. Lighting could be more consistent ”

Lighting is often felt to be **important – and noticed as poor – when combined with other examples of poor maintenance or presentation**

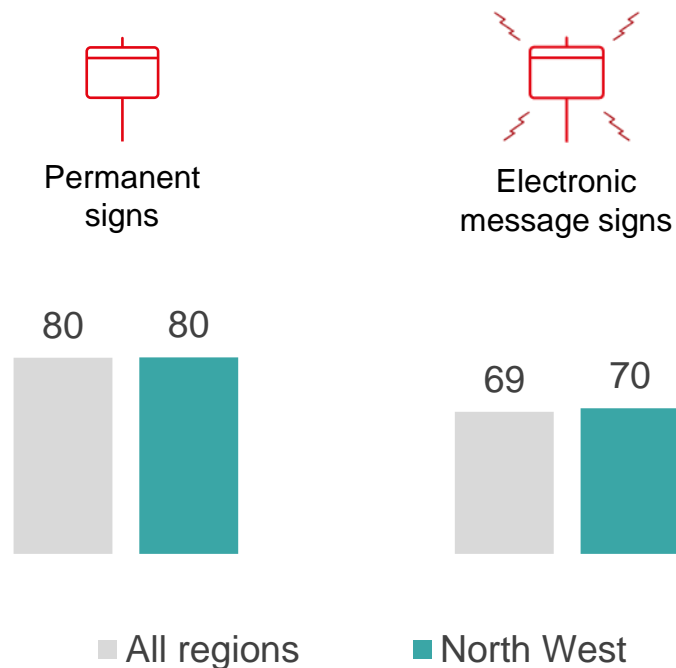
“ ...that section of road is appalling. It is unlit and there are hardly any lane markings ... It seems road repairs have been completed, but the safety features (cats eyes and dotted lines) have not been replaced, making driving in inclement weather dangerous. ”

“ Direction signs not always obvious and lighting not great ”

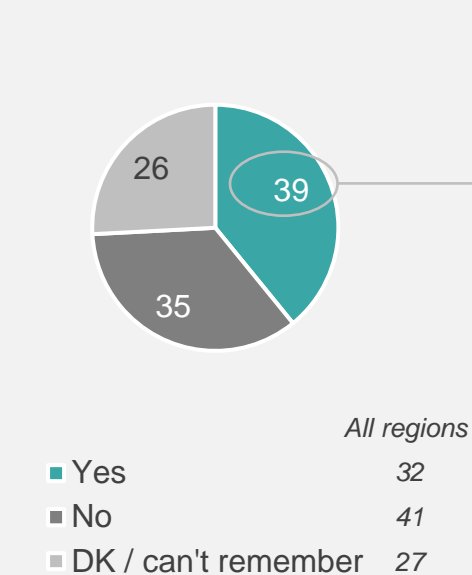
The North West performs similarly to the national average for signage (though electronic signs perceived to be slightly more prevalent)

Rating of signage

% very/fairly satisfied, North West vs all-region average

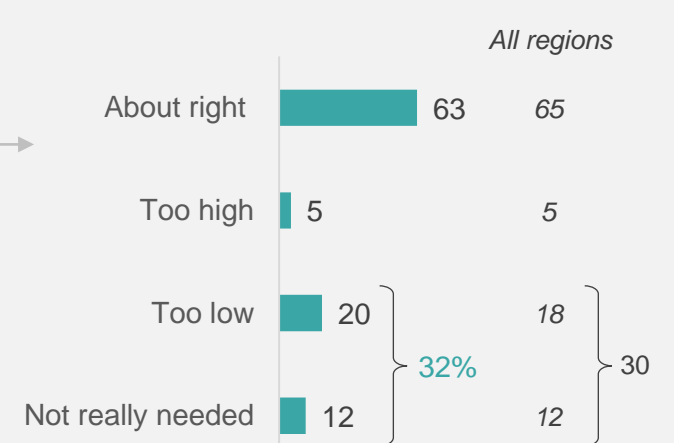


Saw electronic signs % North West



Similar pattern across regions

Appropriateness of electronic speed limits for conditions % North West



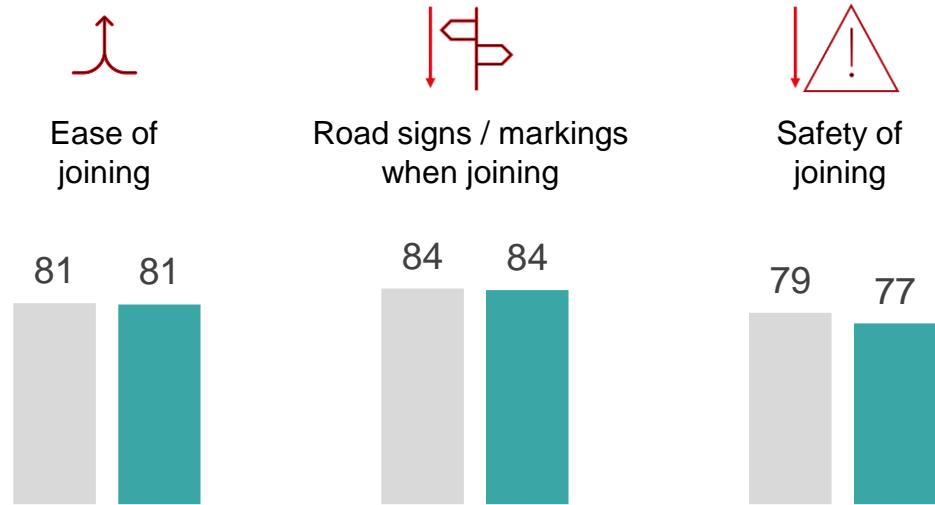
Similar pattern across all regions

Base: Permanent signs (8,585), Aug '22 – Jul '23, North West (1,320)
Electronic signs, among those having seen them, Aug '22 – Jul '23, all regions (6,195), North West (1,047)

Most users satisfied with joining/leaving SRN; leaving a marginally smoother process. North West is similar to other regions

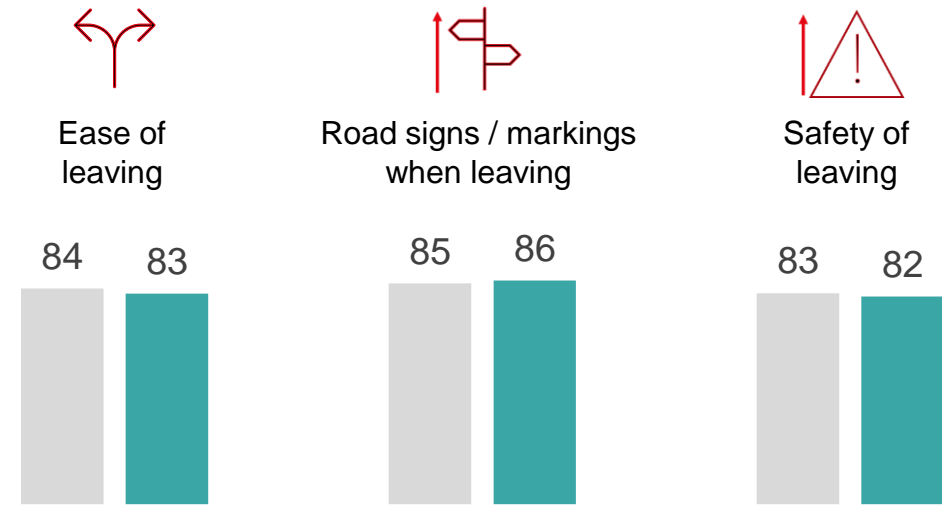
Rating of joining

% very/fairly satisfied, North West vs all-regions average



Rating of leaving

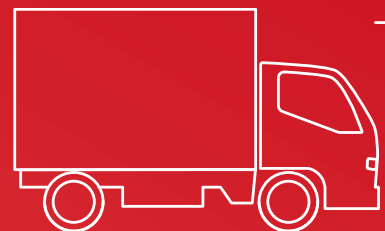
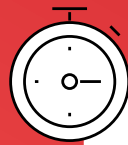
% very/fairly satisfied, North West vs all-regions average



■ All regions

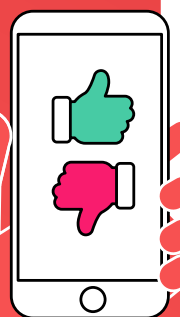
■ North West

Base: all regions (8,908-9,010), North West (1,368-1,380), Aug '22 – Jul '23



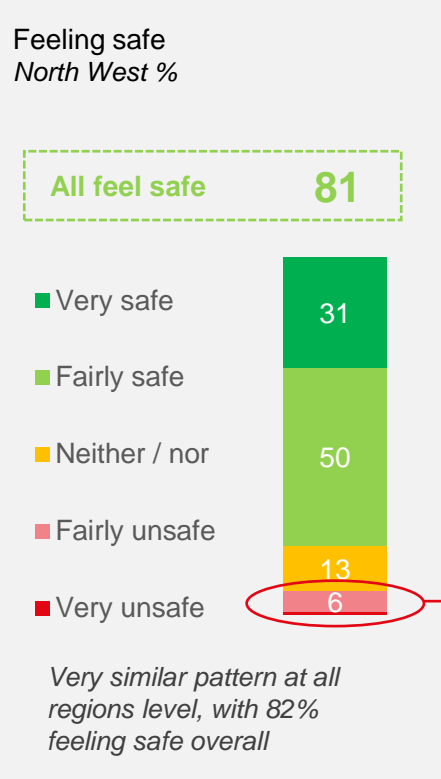
Focus on other topics

Using and sharing the road comfortably
SRN users and smart motorways
Some smaller driver groups



Safety perception high overall, but some feel less at ease. Better weather mitigation, improved driver behaviour, and more consistency of traffic movement, could all alleviate stress.

Safety perception in the North West is similar to the average



Base: All answering, Aug '22 – Jul '23, North West (1,379), all regions (9,055)

All drivers can feel unsafe at times, but this is a little more likely for those with certain...

Driver/party characteristics

- Females
- With a disability
- When travelling alone OR with young children

Journey patterns and road usage

- Driving a motorcycle or light goods vehicle
- In weekday peaks, for commuting
- On motorways – especially smart motorways
(62% of all those feeling unsafe on motorways were on a smart motorway, compared to only 45% of all motorway journeys where the driver felt safe)

External factors

- In heavy rain, or after dark
- When disrupted (delays, roadworks, heavy traffic)

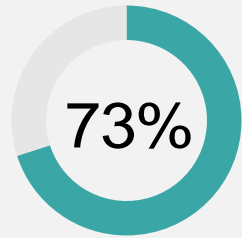
Findings in this column and box are at national level

When they felt unsafe during a journey, drivers' reasons for dissatisfaction were similar to those who felt safe (with perceived congestion and roadworks the key issues), but with heightened emphasis on:

- Variable/temporary speed limits
Drivers ...[braking] without warning, especially ...when 50 turned to national speed limit then back to 50 quickly then back to national speed limit for no apparent reason.
- Other factors linked to smart motorways
...no hard shoulder ...if you break down there is nowhere to go and [I] feel more vulnerable with the motorcycle... also the variable speed cameras ...flickering ... and one reading the wrong speed limit compared to the others
This is a smart motorway. A car was stationary in first lane but there were no warnings on the overhead signs.
- Poor maintenance/presentation
Too much litter ...it poses extra hazards ...[And] 60 to 40 to 50, back to 40, national speed limit, then 40... in the space of 4 junctions ...increases risk by drivers looking constantly at the signs, their dash and surrounding traffic.
- The weather
...I don't like that draining asphalt isn't used yet in a country where rainy days are the norm... can lead to ...accidents
- Poor lighting/markings
Large puddles ...in the overtaking lane. Extremely dangerous as no street lighting, no drainage
- ...and comments around others' accommodation of these issues
...confusing roadworks and accompanying signage ...especially when other drivers use intimidation to hurry you.

Poor driving perceived as common and many feel more could be done to address it... but equally, not all recognise their own potentially risky behaviour

Experienced poor driving behaviour, North West %

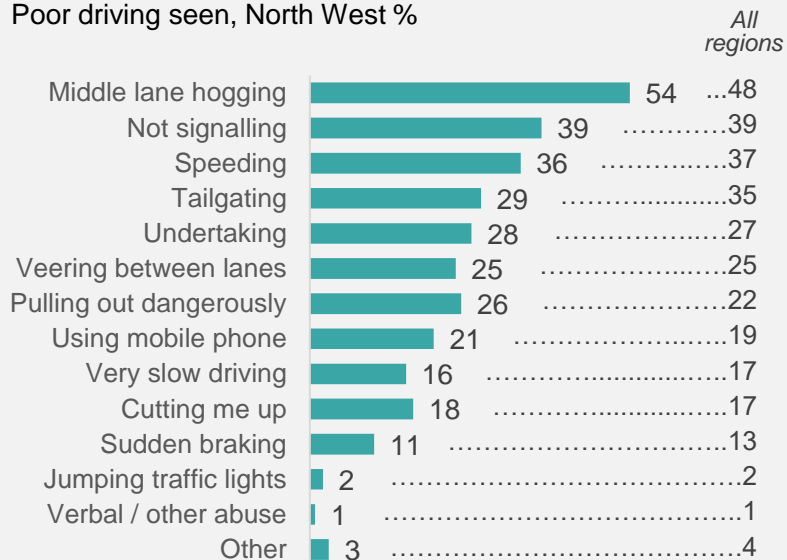


All-regions average: 70%

Similar in both Cheshire and Merseyside and Lancashire and Cumbria

In all regions, poor driving by others is more common on motorways, at 76% vs. 62% on major A roads.

Poor driving seen, North West %



Base: all SRN users surveyed Aug '22 – Jul '23 (9,091), North West (1,387). Experienced others' poor driving behaviour (6,153), North West (986)

Most blame other drivers themselves:

People driving in the 3rd and 4th lane, not overtaking anybody

There are always lots of lorries and it's annoying when they overtake each other

...but for many, other authorities bear some responsibility

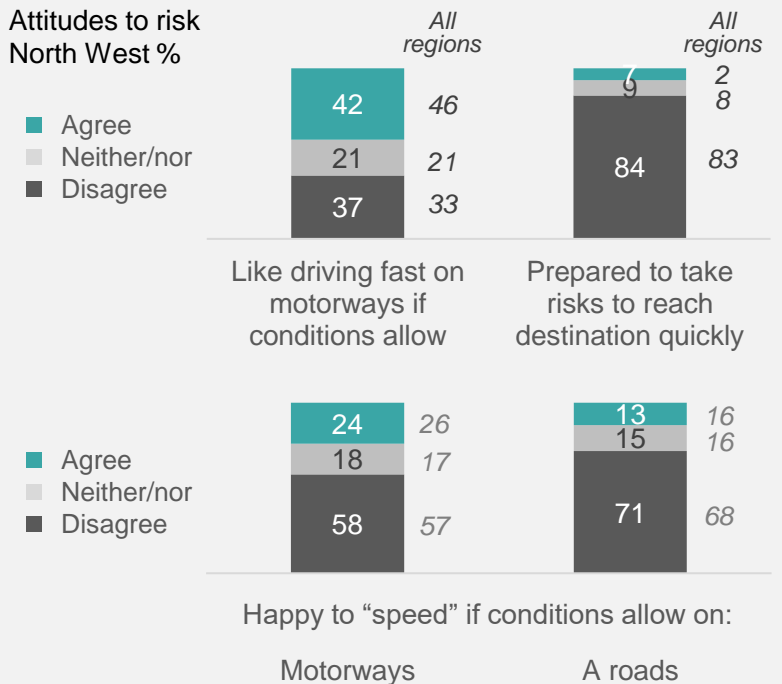
...fine apart from the idiots who 'hog' the centre lane... this issue needs to be lawfully addressed!

Roundabout ...has two lanes but as they are unpainted traffic weaves around, causing danger

The variable speed limits changed frequently... adds danger as vehicles brake suddenly. The general standard of driving is appalling, and should be better policed.

I find the speed signs are not sensitive enough and people then ignore them as there appears to be no reason for [them]... dangerous but... common

Attitudes to risk North West %



Those willing to drive fast and take risks are a little more likely to be:

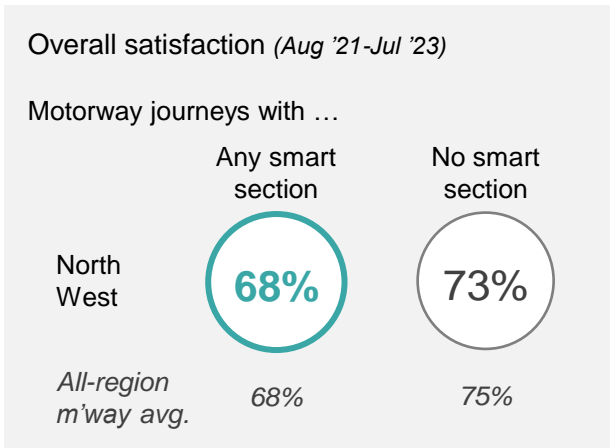
- Male, under 60
- More frequent drivers
- Car drivers (rather than vans, lorries, buses)
- In the South East and M25 region.

Findings outside of grey boxes are at national level

Among those not prepared to take what they deem as "risks", 22% are still happy to speed on motorways, 12% on major A roads

Smart motorway journeys are less positive than others: **in practice** slowed by congestion, and poor safety **perceptions** exacerbate negative experience for some

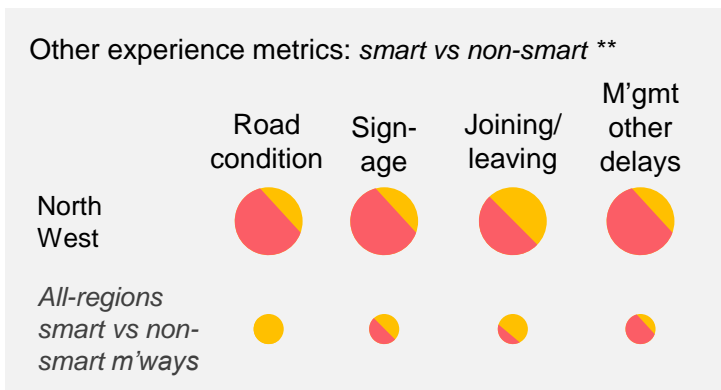
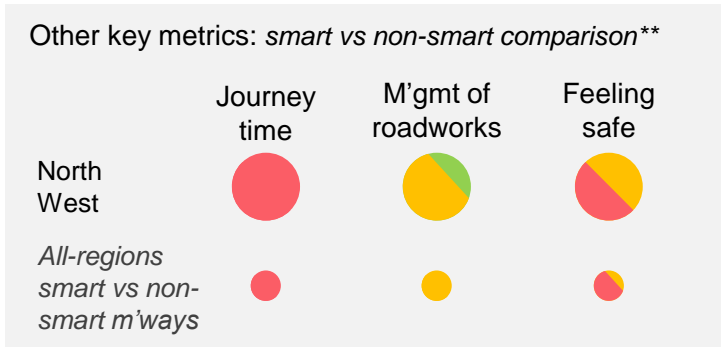
Journeys on smart motorways are typically less satisfactory than on other motorways



The key issue is **journey time**, though many aspects of journeys are less positive than on other motorways

...except **roadworks management: one area where smart motorways do no worse than elsewhere.**

(And perceptions of road condition in many regions, but this needs more work in the North West).



Drivers' comments show that, as for all roads, journey **satisfaction on smart motorways occurs when there is free-flowing momentum** and little or no need to reduce speed.



Reasons for dissatisfaction also reflect what is typical for all roads, but **the impact of heavy traffic and temporary/variable speed limits are even more common on smart motorways.**

Congestion may be inherent to these heavier-usage roads, rather than an effect of their management features (and it may of course be worse without them) – but some users comment that temporary speed limits are not removed quickly enough, or appear to be in place with no reason, slowing traffic unnecessarily in places.



Road surface condition and presentation is a little less common as a driver of dissatisfaction on smart motorways compared to other roads.



Of all comments from dissatisfied users of smart motorways, around **8% explicitly referenced "smart" as being an issue, with safety and removal of hard shoulder the key concern.**

Base: random sample of all who used a smart motorway for any part of journey, Aug '22 – Jul '23, satisfied (104), dissatisfied (106)



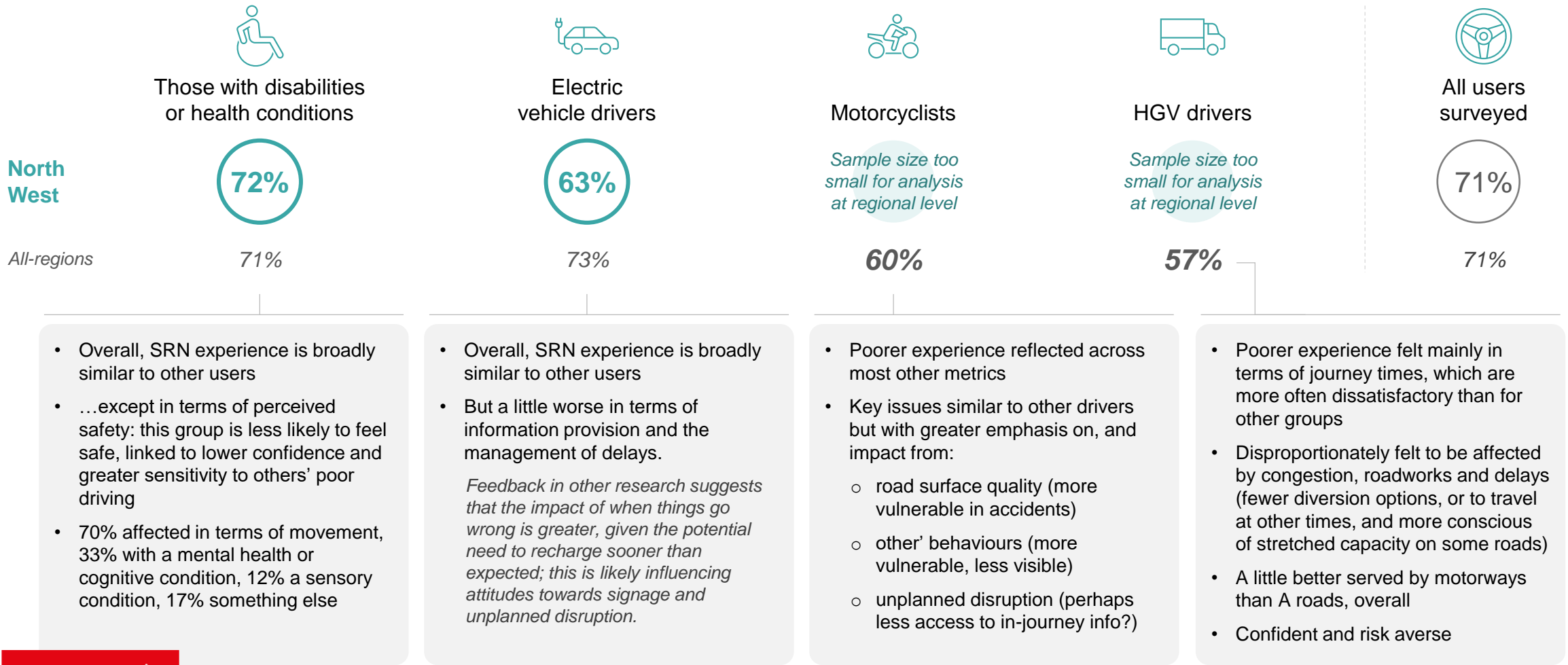
Smart motorways journeys also consistently rated lower than for other roads, over time: the quarterly trend follows at approx. 5% points behind the same pattern for all roads.

And journey satisfaction varies within this for the type of smart operation:

All lane running	70%
Controlled	66%
Dynamic hard shoulder	63%



The experience of some smaller SRN user groups



Findings in grey boxes are at national level

Base: all answering overall satisfaction
 All regions motorcyclists (285), HGVs (242), disabled drivers (728), EV drivers (628), all (9,055). North West disabled drivers (119), EV drivers (76), all (1,382)
 Data for sub-groups based on two years (Aug '21-Jul '23). "All users" data is based on last 12 months only (Aug '22 – Jul '23), as throughout the majority of this report except where specified

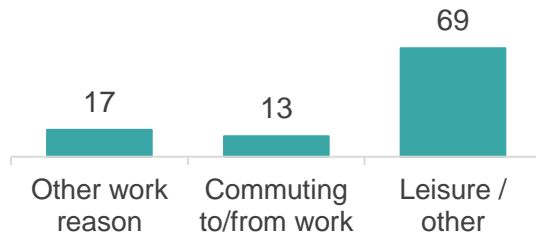
Context for the results and reporting conventions



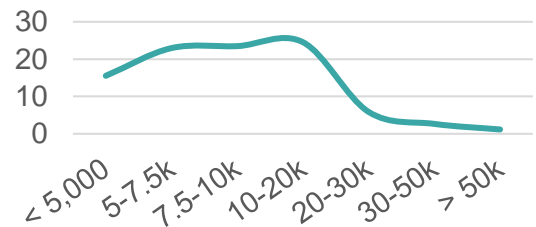
Users, and how they use the SRN in the North West

Driving context

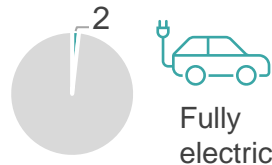
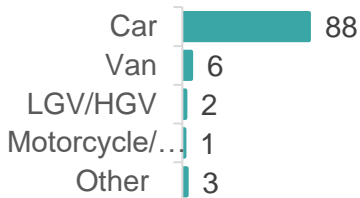
Journey purpose



Annual mileage (total)

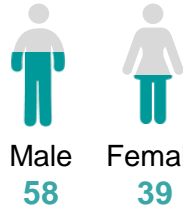


Vehicle type

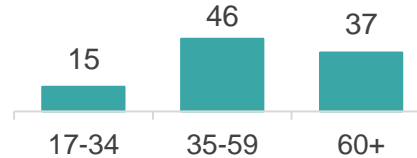


The traveller(s)

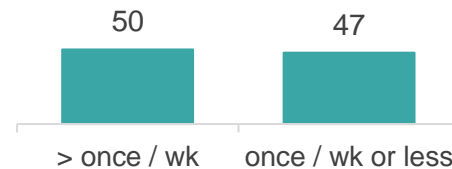
Gender



Age



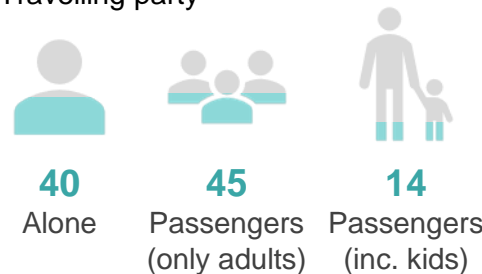
Frequency on SRN



Any disability

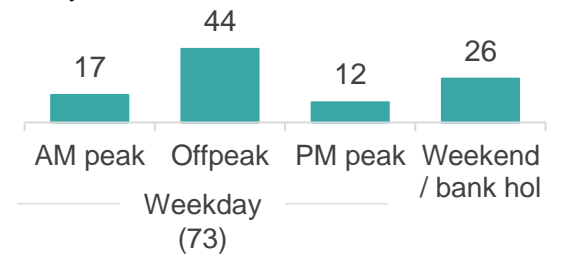


Travelling party



Environment

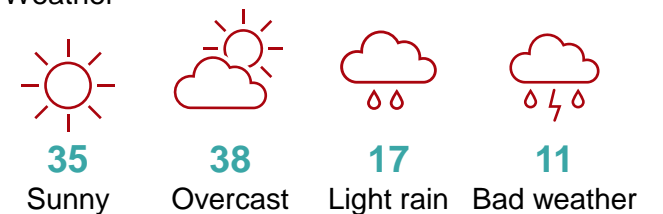
Journey time



18% journeys took place (partly) after dark

88% journeys took place on motorways (vs. 62% nationally)

Weather



Figures shown are for the North West; patterns are very similar at all-regions level with the exception of the **proportion of journeys made on motorways rather than major A roads (which is higher in the North West)**, and weather, where the **North West journeys are a little more likely to have been affected by poorer weather**

Base: all SRN users surveyed, North West, Aug '22 – Jul '23 (1,387)

Some principles in the reporting



Time periods for reporting

Throughout this report, the majority of results show the feedback for journeys which took place between August 2022 to July 2023.

In a small number of instances (marked on the relevant pages) we have supplemented data from this 12-month period with feedback from before August 2022 in order to increase the sample size for reporting purposes.

National and regional-level data

Some pages in this report show data at all-regional (within England) level, summarising a particular topic where the findings are relevant to all regions.

Findings on this page are at national level



These pages are indicated with this symbol.

In other cases, results are at regional level.



Satisfaction and other ratings

Where figures are shown for 'good', 'poor', 'satisfied' ratings, etc., this is the percentage of users who gave an opinion, i.e., this excludes people for whom it was not relevant at all, and those who answered 'don't know'.










'Traffic lights'

Some pages in this report use 'traffic lights' to summarise how well or poorly journeys on the SRN are rated among a particular group of users, on a particular topic, compared to average.

In some cases, this gives an overview of the topic from across several specific measures within a theme, together with qualitative feedback from users on the same themes, in response to open-ended questions. (for example, 'road condition' covers surface, lighting, markings, cats' eyes, litter).

Colours used in these traffic lights therefore take an overview perspective, and constitute a judgement as informed by the survey data. Colours used can be interpreted as follows:

-  Well above average across all relevant measures (and this finding may be supported by notable positive qualitative feedback)
-  Above average across most relevant measures (and may be supported by some positive qualitative feedback)
-  A little above average across some relevant measures (but not all)
-  Largely in line with average (this includes where sample sizes are too small to be confident that the result is genuinely different from average)
-  A little below average across some relevant measures (but not all)
-  Below average across most relevant measures (and may be supported by some negative qualitative feedback)
-  Well below average across all relevant measures (and may be supported by notable negative qualitative feedback)

Contact

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Passengers' Council