

Variation to the third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3)

Response from Transport Focus

1) Do you support or oppose the changes to RIS3 outlined above, including the overall £428 million reduction proposed and the specific areas for savings proposed to achieve it?

Transport Focus recognises the decision of the government to reduce the spending plans for RIS3 as a result of the Defence Investment Plan.

It is our view that a £428 million reduction will likely have an adverse impact on the road user experience. However, we do believe that approach set out in achieving these reductions, prioritising renewals and maintenance, is broadly the right course of action available given the circumstances, with some important additions which we have set out below with our other comments.

Please let us know the reasons for your response and any other comments you have on the proposals or any alternatives.

In the context that no reduction in funding is desirable from a road user perspective, making a reduction in enhancement expenditure rather than renewals is consistent with road users' views about priorities for investment. Reductions in 'other capital' expenditure is however concerning (please see our answer to Question 3, below).

In regard to the A46 Newark Bypass and A38 junctions, from a road user perspective it seems odd to cancel them outright rather than move to a 'consider for inclusion in RIS4' category. The issues those projects were designed to address have not suddenly gone away. If these projects are cancelled outright, the Department should set out how it intends to address those issues in a different way.

2) Do you agree or disagree with the prioritisation of capital funding for maintenance and renewals?

Transport Focus strongly agrees that maintaining and renewing the existing strategic road network should take priority over enhancements. Ongoing capital

investment in road surface and operational technology asset renewal (signs, signals, stopped vehicle detection equipment etc.) is particularly important to road users' day to day experience using National Highways' roads.

Please let us know the reasons for your response.

Transport Focus strongly supports the prioritisation of maintenance and renewals within the variation to RIS3. However, we also consider it imperative that operational element of capital spend is protected to the greatest extent possible. It is only through the combination of operations, maintenance and renewals that road user priorities and satisfaction can be addressed.

Our research has repeatedly found that the biggest priorities for improvement to journeys on the SRN are improved quality of road surfaces, safer design and upkeep of roads, better management of roadworks and better management of unplanned delay such as accidents or breakdowns. Similarly, our Strategic Roads User Survey 2025-26 found that the biggest influences on road user satisfaction were satisfaction with journey time, journey time compared to expectation, whether there were delays caused by things other than roadworks, level of traffic and how safe it felt on the road and satisfaction with the road surface.

The commonality between each of these priorities and influences on satisfaction is that operations, maintenance and renewals are all essential elements for addressing them. Should operational capital funding not be protected, there is a risk of undermining user confidence in the network across several key areas.

3) Do you have any views on how the RIS3 objectives may be prioritised in any capital funding reductions?

Transport Focus acknowledges that National Highways is best placed to make decisions on how to achieve the necessary 2% saving from its other capital funding. However, from a road user perspective we believe that the original budgets for National Programmes, Designated Funds as well as digital and corporate services should be protected to the greatest extent possible.

National Programmes and Designated Funds are important as these programmes deliver defined outputs that support RIS3 objectives in various ways, where these are not funded elsewhere.

Digital and corporate services is an important area because developing information services for users is essential to National Highways becoming the

customer-orientated organisation it aims to be. It is particularly important to protect digital services specifically because, as RIS3 sets out, these systems “*support roadside technology, which is now central to how the network is managed and how information is shared with customer*” while ensuring that “systems are reliable, secure and resilient.”

In summary, National Highways should look to prioritise Objective 3: 'a level of network performance that meets customers' needs', which also serves to support Objective 2, 'improving safety for all', and directly contributes to Objective 1, 'growing the economy'.

- 4) Regarding the two enhancement schemes, is there any further information or evidence you can provide to supplement the assessment information provided in Annex A?**

No.