

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Strategic road investment](#), HC 904

Wednesday 1 March 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 March 2023.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Iain Stewart (Chair); Mr Ben Bradshaw; Jack Brereton; Ruth Cadbury; Paul Howell; Karl McCartney; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 106–161

Witnesses

I: Guy Dangerfield, Head of Transport User Strategy, Transport Focus; Sharon Kindleysides, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport; Edmund King OBE, President, The AA; and Jonathan Walker, Head of Cities and Infrastructure Policy, Logistics UK.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Transport Focus](#)
- [Logistics UK](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Guy Dangerfield, Sharon Kindleysides, Edmund King OBE and Jonathan Walker.

Q106 **Chair:** Welcome to today's session of the Transport Select Committee. For the purposes of our record, can I ask the witnesses to state their name and organisation?

Jonathan Walker: I am Jonathan Walker. I am head of cities and infrastructure policy at Logistics UK.

Sharon Kindleysides: I am Sharon Kindleysides. I am the chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport.

Edmund King: I am Edmund King. I am president of the Automobile Association and the director of the AA Charitable Trust for Road Safety and the Environment.

Guy Dangerfield: I am Guy Dangerfield, head of strategy at Transport Focus.

Q107 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Today we are looking at strategic road investment. I will begin with a fairly broad-brush question. The vision for the road network set out in RIS2 references both the need to support economic growth and productivity and the desire to reach net zero transport emissions by 2050. To what extent are those two goals in conflict or can they be complementary? Who would like to start with that?

Sharon Kindleysides: I will take the lead, if I may. I am probably going to give the official politician's answer: they are both complementary and contradictory. If you think of how we are going to get to net zero, we are looking at different ways of getting people off the roads, such as getting people working from home or using alternative transport methods, but if we are looking to develop the levelling-up agenda, we also want people to be able to move and work in those areas.

I think that has to go hand in hand, particularly from a freight and logistics point of view. A lot of warehouses end up on green or brownfield sites where there is only road access, which bakes in some of the problem. Perhaps we need to look a bit more at land-use policies and other ways— putting freight, for example, on rail. We need to look at it as a whole and decide what is most important to us, perhaps whether we have to ease up on one target, which might be net zero or might be levelling up, to meet the other one, which has a greater benefit for the whole.

Jonathan Walker: The logistics sector is ready and willing to play its part in the transition to net zero. We have to accept that for the foreseeable future the vast majority of freight will continue to be moved by road. It makes sense. Clearly, it is the only practical option currently for the last-mile journey; once you move things off rail, ports and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

airports, they have to be moved by road. The sector has made significant strides in doing that.

When we look at future rounds of road investment, it is clear that those plans and strategies will need to have the transition to net zero baked in from the outset. That will include planning for what is likely to be a wide variety of alternative fuelling options that the industry is exploring. Obviously, we have things like hydrogen and electric vehicles, all of which have their own use cases. As we look to RIS3 and beyond, it is clear that, even if we are not certain yet which will be the most likely widespread technology, planning for things like roadside facilities and charging points needs to be baked in. Then we get to a point where those two goals are not in conflict, but one enables the other.

Edmund King: If I could add something from a consumer point of view, we are still going to need roads in the future, for freight and, indeed, for passenger travel, no matter what we do to enhance public transport. In terms of the environment, possibly the way to look at it is how we can accelerate the greening of the fleet. The Government's commitment to 2030 and 2035 for hybrids is quite a catalyst that is concentrating minds. We are seeking an uptake of electric vehicles with zero emissions at tailpipe. Obviously, we have to look at well to wheel and whole life.

It is about whether we can speed that up and level it up. Currently, there is no doubt that electric vehicles are about £10,000 more expensive. It is fine if you are in a job where you have a company car or salary sacrifice. It is fine if you have off-street parking and can charge at home because that is much cheaper, with night-time tariffs and so on. To level it up and broaden it out so that it is more accessible to more people, we will need more incentives to green the overall car park. That will take some time.

Guy Dangerfield: At the end of the day, cost and convenience are what determine how people choose to travel, and that will continue to be the case for many years. Road users say to us that they want and expect Government to be making the infrastructure capable of supporting electric vehicles and whatever is chosen for heavy freight in due course.

Q108 **Chair:** Thank you. My colleagues and I want to dig into some of the specifics in a moment. Again at the very high level and given what you have just said, to what extent do you think that the planning for strategic roads fits into a broader transport strategy, whether it is interchanges from road to rail for freight or providing the infrastructure to support electric vehicles for passenger cars? Are you comfortable that these are all being looked at holistically or is it still too atomised?

Guy Dangerfield: Perhaps I could cite one of the recommendations that Transport Focus made to the Department for road investment strategy 3, which is that there should be greater effort to integrate the strategic roads with alternatives that would allow people not to drive all the way on those roads, whether that is park and ride with rail, park and ride with coach or anything else. We have made that recommendation.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jonathan Walker: We are very clear that logistics needs to be recognised as the backbone of the economy. It puts food on shelves, gets medicines into hospitals and gets us essential goods that keep the economy moving. Therefore, it cannot be seen in isolation, in a silo.

We are pleased with Government's and the DfT's move to talk about creating a national freight network. We now very much need to see the action that follows up on that and to ensure that strategies for road investment, Network Rail, ports and airports—all the various elements of the logistics sector—are connected, and that logistics and supply chains, which we have all been exposed to and seen during covid in particular, are placed front and centre in decision making. Picking up on the net zero point, that will extend to things like national planning policy and national energy policy. How do we make sure that all those areas are joined up so that we have an efficient and effective freight and logistics sector?

Edmund King: In terms of planning, there is no doubt that we need more work to tie up the strategic road network to a charging network on a much bigger scale. Where does the power come from? Are the grid connections in the right places? Working on Guy's point, can you then get a good park and ride adjacent to the strategic road network where you can, first, charge up your car, and, secondly, cycle, take a bus or take a train into the urban areas? I am not sure that that broader vision, looking 20 years ahead to the utopia of what we would want to get the best—that kind of blue-sky thinking beyond RIS3—is out there.

Sharon Kindleysides: I absolutely agree. When we look at planning, we have to make sure that we think of everything, particularly where the strategic road network becomes a local network. A lot of logistics companies are not based on a main road. As well as having the lorries coming to and fro, we have a large number of people coming to and fro.

In looking at planning more widely and considering land use, we should remember that one lorry will have multiple drivers in a day and at shift changeover you have very localised congestion, which could be in an area where it was never thought the road network was going to see congestion. We are based in Corby. There are a lot of warehouses around there. We must always remember those wider impacts. Not everybody is commuting into a city. They are commuting to science parks and business parks. Please look at everything in the round.

Q109 **Mr Bradshaw:** Guy, you said that you thought that cost and convenience would be the main drivers of how private motorists behaved going forward. Do you accept that in urban areas cost and convenience are probably better through a combination of walking, cycling, public transport and car clubs, rather than private car ownership and use, yet quite a lot of people still choose to own a private car and drive it short distances? Is there a behavioural issue that Government might need to address?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Guy Dangerfield: They might well do, but from all the research we have done, the decision will ultimately be, is the balance of cost and convenience right for me on this particular journey? I suspect that we are all familiar with doing those calculations in our heads without really thinking about it.

Q110 **Mr Bradshaw:** That assumes prior car ownership. A lot of people do not own a car.

Guy Dangerfield: Indeed, although choosing between other modes would involve similar things, such as whether the bus was more expensive than the train.

Q111 **Mr Bradshaw:** Given everything that you have all said in answer to the Chair's initial questions, did you think that the Government's programme of enhancements or projects in RIS2 were the right ones or not? Were they the ones that you were expecting?

Jonathan Walker: RIS2 was an ambitious programme. We have seen in the NAO report where we have got to in terms of delays and various aspects of it not being delivered. Perhaps it could be argued that it was overly ambitious, but we welcomed the size, scale and scope of that scheme.

We think that the interventions in it were largely right, but I would probably refer back to my previous point. Sometimes the frustration in the sector is that schemes take so long to get to delivery that they are delivered in isolation and then, in many cases, they push the problem around. That is often in the absence of a wider strategy around creating a national freight network. Actually, what we need is a long, 20 or 30-year plan for how we create a freight network in the UK so that strategies follow on neatly from one to the other.

Take the example of something like a new Thames crossing. We also then have to consider what investments will be needed either side of that. It is an important scheme in and of itself, but it is important because of the freight movements in and out of south-east ports.

Q112 **Mr Bradshaw:** Do you accept that the programme is not going to be delivered? If so, which projects do you think should be dropped?

Jonathan Walker: We need to see rationalisation in the context of freight. We want schemes kept in that have a very clear benefit for the movement of goods, for freight and supply chains. To refer back slightly to the previous question as well, clearly, we will see some shifts in individual passenger behaviour—around active travel, electric vehicles and so on—but, fundamentally, goods still need to get on to shop shelves, wherever we move to. Therefore, we believe that freight ought to be prioritised, both in the rationalisation of RIS2 and in future strategies.

Q113 **Mr Bradshaw:** Is there any dissent from that about what should be



dropped?

Edmund King: If you think back to how road decisions were made before the road investment strategies, it was pretty dreadful. It would be individual MPs fighting for the A11 against the A47. There was no strategy, so I accept that the general principle of having a five-year plan, with some money put aside, is an improvement on how it was. What I would question, though, is whether there are things in RIS2 that were not cost-effective and should not have been in it.

The prime example is smart motorways and their development. There are various post-opening project evaluations that show they were trying to improve smart motorways by adding in more ERAs or stopped-vehicle detection after the event. Those things should have been done 10 or 20 years ago, not retrofitted after the event. That is costing millions of pounds. It was costing something like £900 million to fit an extra 125 emergency refuge areas, another 500 signs and a stopped-vehicle detection system that we found out in December from the Office of Rail and Road was not meeting any of its targets; 85% were false alarms.

Smart motorways are a system that was brought in on the cheap to try to save money. People were told at the time that it would put both lives and congestion at risk. If you look at it in congestion terms, whenever there is an incident, the lane has to be closed, which causes massive delays, whereas when there is a hard shoulder, quite often the incident can go over to that and the flow of traffic can continue. The work that analysed the M6 between junctions 8 and 10 showed that collisions were 34% higher. The work that looked at the M1 between junctions 10 and 13 saw that journey times were actually longer as well.

That is one example of really poor policy over the years. There has just been a sticking-plaster approach. Can we make it slightly better? Can we put in a few more ERAs? Can we put in a bit more technology, even though that technology is not working? Really, the decision should have been made 10 years ago to stop this nonsense. Drivers hate driving on smart motorways.

Q114 **Mr Bradshaw:** We have done a lot of work on smart motorways and have made exactly those points ourselves.

Edmund King: Indeed. Your report was extremely good. They are an example of patching up, rather than having a real vision of what you want from the road network.

Q115 **Mr Bradshaw:** Finally, before I pass back to the Chair, we will hear later from a witness who says that there is no real evidence that building roads improves productivity at all. Do you dissent from that? If so, do you accept the Treasury's current modelling?

Guy Dangerfield: I am not going to answer that directly. What we have found in the research that we have undertaken is that two thirds of strategic road users place greater importance on the maintenance and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

renewal of what we already have than on expanding the strategic road network. In RIS2 there was significant, though arguably not enough, capital for renewal of concrete roads. It is really important that RIS3 contains the proper sum of capital renewal to keep pace with the inevitable deterioration that goes on from weather and wear and tear.

Mr Bradshaw: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q116 **Jack Brereton:** Mr Walker, I want to ask you about your comments a minute ago. You said that RIS2 was overly ambitious. Do you think that it was also badly managed? Were there issues about the wider management of RIS2 that have resulted in some of these delays?

Jonathan Walker: That comment about the ambition of RIS2 was me reflecting what has been found and established by the National Audit Office report and various others. Clearly, there were and continue to be some external pressures, such as inflation, that caused problems with that.

What is clear is that what we, the DfT and National Highways need to learn going forward is how to get things through planning, and how to manage the planning process and be better prepared to ensure that schemes are not held up and delayed in planning for what can often feel like an indefinite period. That is where the frustration comes from industry; schemes they may have been calling for for a number of years finally make it into the road investment strategy and then we sit for many years with what feels like very little to no progress for industry, which makes it difficult to plan and invest for the future.

Q117 **Jack Brereton:** You do not have any concerns about the general management of the programme.

Jonathan Walker: I refer to my comments about, in particular, getting things through planning. That links back to the point about ambition and being realistic about how long these processes are going to take.

Q118 **Jack Brereton:** Are there any other comments and concerns about the general management of RIS2?

Edmund King: Your Committee members raised it very well in the last session, to be frank. I thought that was a very informed conversation.

Q119 **Jack Brereton:** Thank you. This is going to have an impact on the scope of RIS3. Obviously, a lot of the hangover from RIS2 is likely to have to be delivered in RIS3, which will significantly constrain the number of schemes that are likely to be able to be added in RIS3. Do you have any concerns about that? Are there any specific schemes that you would particularly prioritise to be added in RIS3?

Guy Dangerfield: The really important thing is that the renewals capital does not get squeezed to top up the enhancement portfolio and that the underlying quality of the existing network is not allowed to deteriorate because of delays in road period 2.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Edmund King: To add to the general point, as Mr Dangerfield said, when we talk to our members—drivers—about the strategic road network, No. 1 is actually the state of the roads. That is their No. 1: get rid of the potholes. Of course, motorways and trunk roads are better than local roads because they get more funds proportionately and funding is ringfenced, but there are still strategic roads, such as the A5 near Stony Stratford, that have problems. That would be something.

There is a second priority that is perhaps not given enough emphasis. There was one really good example from DfT with its safer roads fund, which looked at the top 50 most dangerous roads and invested in those. Potentially, that kind of investment, over six, seven, eight, nine or 10 years, could save about 1,500 lives. Perhaps we should have more emphasis on looking at the road system and the areas that really are the danger spots and the congestion spots, rather than just a broader road programme. Most people accept that we have the roads that we need for getting from A to B.

Guy Dangerfield: In our research among 5,000 strategic road users, the top two priorities for improvement are surface quality and better design and upkeep of the roads.

Sharon Kindleysides: Everybody talks about road conditions and probably gets excited about potholes in their local area, but when we are looking at investment, we have to be aware that we are going to have to put in a lot of provision for HGV drivers. It is not strictly the road network, and I know that the DfT gave out some money for this before Christmas, but we rely on that network. People are sleeping by the side of the roads and we need to do something for them and their wellbeing. Although it is not the actual tarmac and I am fully in favour of making sure that we maintain what we have, we need to think slightly more widely about the road users as well.

Jonathan Walker: I will try to add to what has gone before. I fully endorse the positions on road maintenance and driver facilities, which are really important priorities for our members. What the logistics industry wants more than anything is consistency and reliability on the road network, and predictability, so that your operations can be planned in advance and you get reliability of journey times, congestion and so on. That needs to be first and foremost in the minds of people planning RIS3. I refer back to my previous point as well. If we are looking ahead to RIS3, on from the RIS2 schemes, there should be chaining together of projects, so that we are not pushing problems around the network but actually seeking to resolve them.

Q120 **Jack Brereton:** We should be looking more at the strategic corridors in that work.

Jonathan Walker: Yes.

Q121 **Jack Brereton:** I want to touch a bit more on the points that Mr King



was raising a minute ago about the cost-effectiveness of projects. The reality is that a lot of schemes are not necessarily best value. Most of the schemes beyond London and the south are low and poor value for money, but they still get in because of the strategic need across the country. You saw the last session, when we had a discussion about the fact that a large proportion of previous schemes have been concentrated mainly in the south of the country. If, as you say, we are going to look only at the aspect of cost-effectiveness, how will we ensure that we have a broad mix of schemes right across the country?

Edmund King: In economic terms, you have to look at where you get best benefit. Quite often it will be by linking it to employment prospects. Take the example of links to the ports. We need a better, more reliable road network linking to our ports, not just in the south but throughout the country. That helps freight, but it also helps employment in those areas. The broader economic benefits of a good link to the ports go beyond that bit of tarmac. There are much broader benefits.

Q122 **Jack Brereton:** So it is not just about cost-effectiveness.

Edmund King: Exactly. You have to look at the broader issue. Jonathan referred to certain economic corridors that are more important than others.

Q123 **Jack Brereton:** Are you concerned that some of those schemes might get squeezed out? Obviously, there will be a huge amount of pressure on RIS3. If we focus just on what is best value, that will mean that important schemes in the midlands, the north and other parts of the country will not necessarily see the light of day.

Edmund King: That is where the broader levelling-up agenda should come into force. There are occasions when you go beyond the straight cost-benefit analysis for a stretch of road to look at the broader situation. That could be the case in the midlands, the north-east and the north-west. There would be good claims for that.

Q124 **Paul Howell:** Guy, you touched on the fact that there is a balance between maintenance and enhancement and where the actual thing should go. Can we explore that position a bit further? I know what your survey said, but what is your opinion, and the opinion of the rest of the panel, on that balance in where we are? If there is a different prioritisation, which enhancements are the most important ones? Can we go back around that loop a bit?

Guy Dangerfield: We are driven by what road users say to us. The research is very clear on the broad principle that maintaining what we already have is of greater priority than building new stuff. When asked what their priorities for improvement are in terms of strategic road journeys, they talk about things like surface quality, safer design and upkeep and better management of roadworks. Those are the things that road users say are their priorities for improvement to journeys that they make on National Highways roads.



Q125 **Paul Howell:** Which I think comes back to the point that Mr King made earlier about the need to focus on where the congestion and danger hotspots are.

Guy Dangerfield: A focus on those hotspots, whether for safety or for congestion, is important. We see from the strategic roads user survey, which is the customer survey that we run and that is used by the Office of Rail and Road to monitor National Highways, that the difference between a good journey—a satisfactory journey—and one that isn't is all about things like journey time and reliability. Ironing out the congestion hotspots is important.

Q126 **Paul Howell:** Mr King, do you have anything to add that you have not already covered?

Edmund King: Looking back on this, 20 to 25 years ago there were lots of gaps in the network. There were single-carriageway roads linking major cities that should have been dualled. In most cases, that has been fulfilled. The A11 from London to Norwich is a route that I often use. I campaigned for a long time to get that dualled.

Q127 **Paul Howell:** I am slightly further north, so it is the A1 from the north to Scotland.

Edmund King: Indeed. It is the same point. There are still some gaps. You can argue that in terms of safety the A1 north of Newcastle should be dualled, because drivers take risks, but I think that fundamentally we now have quite a good road network. I would not have said that 20 years ago. I think the priority within that should be: where are the congestion hotspots and crash hotspots, and can't we just concentrate on that rather than major schemes that sometimes are the whim of Government?

Q128 **Paul Howell:** Ms Kindleysides?

Sharon Kindleysides: We have a good panel today; we are all agreeing with each other. Definitely, we should maintain what we have but also look at where there are gaps that relate to the logistics network. We tend to have warehouses not necessarily in the best positions. As Jonathan said, we might want to look at strategic corridors but also ports and work opportunities. It is almost a matter of deciding who we least want to sit in congestion. If we can only solve one source of congestion, would we rather have a car owner in it or the logistics chain in it?

Q129 **Paul Howell:** Sorry, can I cut in? What we have seen coming out of the pandemic and operating throughout that timeframe anyway is quite a dramatic change in the whole shopping world and things like that and, therefore, the logistics world, the obvious brand being Amazon, with the creation of new warehouses around the countryside and more little white vans going all over the place. Has where the congestion hotspots are changed, or does that need to be looked at to see where it is changing, because of the movement in the whole logistics world and where traffic is going now?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sharon Kindleysides: It absolutely does. The case study I always give is that around Christmas time everybody's front door suddenly becomes a logistics depot because of the number of parcels delivered both to you and your neighbours. A lot of residential areas—I know it is not the strategic road network—are having levels of traffic they were not designed for. The feeder roads into them also have that level of traffic. I am at the end of a cul-de-sac. We can have five or six delivery vehicles before Christmas.

It feeds back into planning and whether we want to look at this as a whole. It is all well and good saying, "Please don't use your private car to go shopping," but how many individual deliveries do you need to have before it would have been better for you to go out? I heard somewhere that an average household has 79 parcel deliveries a year. Some of my neighbours might be building that up, so it is definitely something we have to think about.

Q130 **Paul Howell:** I could make the same point. I think we will come back to the local road infrastructure questions slightly separately. I just want to continue this with the panel.

Jonathan Walker: I echo a lot of what Sharon said. It is important to remember that a significant number of the vans on the road are making deliveries, but a lot are performing many other essential tasks to keep the economy moving. I echo some of the points that have been made previously. If we are looking at interventions aimed at alleviating congestion, particularly urban congestion, moving slightly away from the SRN, often interventions feel as though they can be targeted towards the freight and logistics sector when, actually, as a country with net zero ambitions and so on, surely our primary focus ought to be on ending single-passenger journeys.

On SRN congestion, I endorse what has gone before and just add some comments purely on the cost of congestion to the economy. There is data suggesting that in 2022 congestion cost the entire economy £9.5 billion. Keeping an HGV idling in traffic is a significant cost to the business that is operating it. Logistics is a low-margin business and, therefore, the cost is passed on to the consumer or the end user of whatever the vehicle is delivering. There is a significant friction cost to the economy that I think is often overlooked when we consider congestion. There are important environmental aspects, but it costs the economy.

Paul Howell: I could go into a couple of those, Chair, but I think it is appropriate to move on to the local thing.

Chair: On the average figure of 79 parcels a year, I think my partner will be able to increase that quite considerably.

Q131 **Ruth Cadbury:** Mr Dangerfield, you represent all transport users, not just drivers. Do you think that the way the Department for Transport delivers the strategic road network also considers the needs of the people



HOUSE OF COMMONS

where those roads pass through and, for non-motorways, active travel users travelling along those routes?

Guy Dangerfield: For clarity, Transport Focus's role with road is just in relation to National Highways roads. However, it includes those travelling along them and across them on foot, on a bicycle or indeed on a horse. We are very clear that National Highways needs to focus on the needs of those users, obviously not on motorways, although crossing applies there as well. What we know from research is that the priorities for that group of road users is safety, for obvious reasons, followed by very similar things around maintenance of what is there already. People will describe how there is a perfectly good path next to the strategic road network, but it is not properly maintained. That is an area of pressure we are putting on National Highways at the moment.

Q132 **Ruth Cadbury:** I was going to ask about things like the design of junctions and so on, but it doesn't sound as if that is your remit.

Guy Dangerfield: One of the areas we are encouraging the Department to think about for RIS3 is the congestion getting on and off the strategic road network and that interface—the integration of strategic and local roads—and to put greater focus on that.

Q133 **Ruth Cadbury:** Your colleagues from the logistics sector have already raised that point from their perspective. Mr King, is there anything you would like to add, particularly on the community interrelationship with SRN roads?

Edmund King: That point is incredibly important, and it is where consultation with local people really should be key. Before a bypass is put in, what do the local people want? You tend to find that a lot of national groups come to public inquiries with their own agenda, but when you talk to local people they can see the benefit of the road as long as there is access to it and it does not ruin their paths, cycleways and so on. I think that bringing local people on board at an earlier level is the way to do it.

Ruth Cadbury: Thank you very much.

Q134 **Greg Smith:** Good morning. Just for transparency, before I start my questions I should say that, in addition to my role on this Committee, I am chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on road freight and logistics. It is very much that area that I want to focus on this morning.

As a starter, we have had evidence from a survey that almost half of coach and lorry managers across the United Kingdom do not believe that the strategic road network meets their business needs. Are you confident that the outlook for the future, particularly through the lens of RIS3, can address that, and what more can be done to ensure that commercial operators on our roads—particularly road haulage and transport, and the coach sector on the strategic road network—can be better supported? Guy, perhaps we can start with you.



Guy Dangerfield: Thank you for quoting from one of our surveys. That's great.

What is interesting about that survey is how, in our view, National Highways needs to think about that sector—as it is doing—to a greater extent as a customer, and use some of the disciplines you would use in a commercial world if those people could wander off somewhere else. That is an important overarching point. It is clear from that survey that the point about roadside facilities is absolutely crucial. The ability for lorry drivers to stop and have their statutory breaks when they need to and where they need to, with reasonable quality of service, is absolutely crucial.

Q135 **Greg Smith:** Before we get into more detail, does anyone have anything to add to the broader point about the commercial needs of our strategic road network?

Sharon Kindleysides: Guy has covered it very well.

Q136 **Greg Smith:** Guy, you just picked up the roadside facilities point. That is clearly a huge area of concern for the industry. This Committee, in previous inquiries, has taken a lot of evidence on it, including getting out on the ground and seeing some of the facilities around the country. How can Government and taxpayer money better support that, and how can the industry provide what it needs better on the ground? What are the drivers, or even the barriers, for both sides of that fence?

Guy Dangerfield: One of the recommendations we made to the Department is that it regards the facilities for drivers who need to use the strategic road network as part of it. That does not mean to say that National Highways needs to own and run it all, but that in co-ordination and understanding where the gaps are and cajoling people to fill those gaps it should have a role, and that those are not just things that happen next to its roads. That would be a very important cultural and philosophical thing to drive a number of the other changes. I think it is about working with the private sector, potentially with match funding as per the current round of investment that the Department and National Highways have announced, and gradually filling those gaps and measuring the improvement in quality. We are in the process of building a survey of lorry driver experience at those facilities to measure the change over time.

Q137 **Greg Smith:** Do you think that the driver welfare grant scheme will make a significant difference? Is it enough? Is it directed in the right place?

Guy Dangerfield: The Department has to start somewhere and this is the first time, as far as I am aware, that there has been a serious intent to do something about this. One can only know later, but it feels like a very positive thing to be doing.

Q138 **Greg Smith:** Does anyone else have anything to add?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jonathan Walker: I endorse that. Some of the positives are that at least it feels that this issue is part of the national conversation now, which it probably wasn't a number of years ago. There are a number of other measures. As Guy said, lorry drivers are mandated to take breaks. If they are mandated by law, there is clearly a stake for Government in at least considering that issue.

There are a number of other measures that could be looked at. Encouraging planning authorities to implement existing guidance is a starting point. As we look at things like RIS3 and nationally significant infrastructure schemes, we should ensure that provision of lorry parking is considered as part of that planning process, even if it is not the Government themselves delivering it. It is also about recognising that the public sector in the broader sense is often a significant landowner alongside the SRN. We are not necessarily talking about the public sector building it, but it is the landlord and, therefore, could provide certainty and longevity on leases for those who want to come in and operate facilities.

Sharon Kindleysides: I very much welcomed the DfT scheme to put some money into driver facilities. We always have to be aware that not everybody needs them in the same place, and it is a lot easier just to put in extra capacity at a motorway service station. One of the things that would be really good is Government support for an analysis of where we need them. Looking at whatever our future propulsion mechanisms will be, that will change. If we arrange facilities around drivers' hours, that is great; we know what the timescales are. If we are going to a fuelling mechanism that needs you to stop more frequently, we have to make sure that we have them in the right places and that we start thinking now. Even if it is electricity, it may not always be electricity.

We need to be flexible for the future, knowing that we will have different needs. It may not be a petrol station, a solar station or a hydrogen station, but we have to start thinking now for the next technology to come along. An example is LPG in cars. It never really took off. Had it had different support things might have been different. What would that do to our need for drivers to stop? Coach drivers have to stop as well. If you have a bus full of 50 people, you do not want to stop in a layby, because it is not very safe. It is looking at it in the round and almost trying to second-guess what will come along, rather than just basing it on what we have now with petrol stations.

Q139 **Greg Smith:** Would you say that some of the delays in some of the projects in RIS2 have had a disproportionate impact on road haulage and wider commercial use of our road network? Jonathan referenced the planning system. Other than money, what within the planning system needs to change most to ensure that we are delivering a road network that works for the vital commercial users of it who get the goods to the shelves that we all want to buy, not least food and necessities?



Jonathan Walker: I will pick up on a fairly recent announcement by Government that we firmly welcome, particularly on nationally significant infrastructure projects and how the planning process for those can be streamlined. We recognise that there is a need to go through the right steps when it comes to planning—environmental considerations, considerations of local communities and so on—but it feels that projects get bogged down in planning and take too long. Therefore, we welcome the Government’s announcement and look forward to responding to the consultation they are planning to release on how that system can be improved and streamlined to make sure that those schemes progress.

Q140 **Greg Smith:** Often when a new road or major upgrade is planned—dualling a road or whatever it might be—the physical road is classed as national infrastructure, but its ancillaries, which could mean road stops, laybys, service stations, and so on, are not. Should they be included? Should we have a much more whole-package approach in planning? That is probably a leading question. How big a jump is that as we start to look at RIS3?

Jonathan Walker: I would not necessarily consider it a huge jump. I go back to the point I made before about considering things like driver welfare facilities as part of that. I refer to some of my previous comments about moving to that sort of route-based approach, looking at strategic corridors and strategic routes and the schemes that underpin those, as opposed to, as you rightly identified, considering it purely as “this road” and “this scheme relating to this road.” It is improving journeys and freight flows in an area along a corridor. In many ways, that is possibly more of a mindset shift than one that requires significant policy interventions.

Q141 **Greg Smith:** Are there any other thoughts on that question?

Sharon Kindleysides: I completely concur. All of it has to be looked at together.

Greg Smith: Thank you. I fear my time is probably up for this section.

Q142 **Karl McCartney:** Edmund, I am not going to come to you first because you have already covered this, but I would like to ask you for your thoughts after the other three have spoken. It is about smart motorways. Do the other three members consider so-called smart motorways to be smart, and do they have a role in delivering capacity in RIS3 and beyond? If not, what are the alternatives?

Jonathan Walker: Logistics UK has up until now been relatively supportive of the roll-out of smart motorways, with the heavy caveat that there is sufficient evidence that it is safe to do so. Our assessment of the safety of those smart motorways will be based on the published statistical evidence, as opposed to anecdotal feedback.

We understand the concerns around the safety of smart motorways, some of the other comments that have already been mentioned and,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

therefore, the rationale behind the pause we have seen. However, it is clear that that pause inevitably had a significant impact on RIS2 delivering its stated and desired outcomes.

We believe that if delivered correctly they provide a readily available and, in theory, cheaper alternative to road-widening schemes, but I would add the significant caveat that we do not consider them a universal or necessarily permanent solution to capacity constraints as well. It is about the right project in the right place.

Q143 Karl McCartney: Okay. I think the fence is taking your weight. Let's see if it can take the weight of the other two panel members.

Sharon Kindleysides: I have to declare an interest here. I have a technology background and was heavily involved in various smart motorways, but not necessarily in this country, so I am probably fairly safe on that. If designed correctly and if driver behaviour understands what they are about, with driver education, they work really well.

I was based in Transport for New South Wales for a while. All its new motorways were built to be smart. That is not just hard-shoulder running, but things like ramp metering to slow down vehicles coming on and off the motorway; it is to do with overall speed. If the technology is there to provide the back-up, they can be a really useful benefit, but I am absolutely in favour of seeing the evidence. I cannot remember the exact statistics, but when the M42 was opened it made an improvement to safety right at the start. Once we have seen the evidence, that will be good, but they have to be done properly. They have to have all the equipment they need from day one. There also has to be a good driver education programme. As a rule, people do not plough into the back of one another on A roads; they know to look out for stopped vehicles, so obviously there is something to do about awareness. I do not know whether it is signage or quite how we do it, but there is something to be done with driver education.

Q144 Karl McCartney: Indeed. If I can drill down, you mentioned a different country and your experience there. Using the technology in New South Wales, if there is a breakdown on an all-lane running motorway, or road of whatever type they call it, does the AI recognise that breakdown, or does it wait for the congestion to build up before it alerts a human being that they need to close that lane?

Sharon Kindleysides: My understanding is that AI picks it up, but there are still people physically looking at the road. The assumption is always that the system should pick it up first, but people are actually watching the CCTV cameras in the traffic monitoring centres.

Q145 Karl McCartney: Do you recall the timescale they work to?

Sharon Kindleysides: I am afraid I don't; I would have to find out.

Q146 Karl McCartney: Guy?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Guy Dangerfield: When we research this area many road users tell us that they like the congestion reduction benefits of the extra lane and the variable speeds smoothing things out, although some argue that that causes more congestion than it solves. There is undoubtedly an underlying wariness about what happens if you break down. Your Committee has explored that in the past. Will National Highways spot me? Will the red X be displayed? Will somebody be concentrating sufficiently to notice the red X? That is the kind of stuff we know about. What road users say to us is that they think awareness of how the technology works would help with perceptions of safety, and that greater education about how to drive on a smart motorway, not just what to do if you break down but the importance of the red X, is crucial as well.

Q147 **Karl McCartney:** Edmund, earlier you gave some quite interesting stats, which I was taking notes of, and I think it's safe to say that you made some pretty salient points, so you have the floor again maybe to extrapolate a little bit.

Edmund King: The question I would ask the Committee quite seriously is this. If you are in a car on the M6 and it develops a problem, would you rather be on a road where you have a chance of pulling over to a hard shoulder or would you rather be on a road where you might be a mile and a half from an emergency refuge area or an exit where you can stop in a lane and have the chance that you might be spotted by stopped-vehicle detection? You have a chance that a red X might come up and a chance that people might abide by that red X. Which would you prefer?

Q148 **Karl McCartney:** You will be pleased to hear that I recently challenged the Minister on that, when he was sitting exactly where you are.

Edmund King: On smart motorways, 37% of breakdowns happen in live lanes. The technology is not great. A week ago, on every smart motorway, apart from the south-east, there was an outage between 8.30 and 10.30. None of the overhead signs was working for two hours. It is just not good enough.

The ideal is to use what is good about smart motorways—the technology. I accept the technology, such as overhead gantries and so on; even having ERAs that are indented from the road is better than a hard shoulder. The ideal is what you call a controlled motorway. It has a hard shoulder and it has ERAs inside it. I would even argue that in terms of congestion currently over 30% of drivers do not use the inside lane on smart motorways because they are petrified somebody has broken down. I would even argue in congestion terms that we should turn the inside lane back into a hard shoulder, use the technology and get the police out there with a lane awareness campaign. There is far too much hogging of the middle lane and outside lanes. We are wasting more than a third of our capacity. Why not put that wasted capacity on to the hard shoulder and have lane discipline? Then the roads would be safer, and you would still have the technology from smart motorways.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

This is where I believe Ministers need to stand up and make the political decision that this nonsense has gone on for too long. The M42 worked because it had ERAs every 400 metres and it had overhead gantries. Then it was rolled out from 400 metres to 2,500 metres without any consultation. The AA and I have been saying that for more than 10 years. I have met more than 12 Ministers and Secretaries of State. To his credit, Grant Shapps looked at it and paused the programme, which was much more than previous Ministers had done, but I believe a political decision needs to be made. It would be very popular with the public; 73% of drivers want smart motorways either scrapped or roads widened with a permanent hard shoulder, so it would be very popular.

Q149 **Karl McCartney:** Edmund, thank you. Having heard that, I think regular users of motorways will be cheering your evidence to the rafters. Guy, do you want to add something?

Guy Dangerfield: I think enforcement of the red X is crucial in this area, partly because of educating drivers to obey it, and because one of the things road users tell us worries them about it is that they do not believe it is being enforced and, therefore, do not trust that people will obey it. If National Highways can do more, working with the police, to ensure that enforcement is good, it would be very helpful.

Q150 **Karl McCartney:** To be fair to Grant Shapps, the Secretary of State, he made it illegal as well. People could be fined.

Guy Dangerfield: Indeed.

Q151 **Chair:** Mr King, before I turn to Ruth for the final question of this session, I seek clarification of your point about the measures required to fix smart motorways, if I can summarise it like that. Do you think that spending should take priority over new road schemes when we come to RIS3?

Edmund King: Absolutely, but ironically the spending would not be massive to reinstate the hard shoulder. The technology is there. You can have a line of paint and a permanent red X on the inside lane. There is good spending going on as well, with enhancement of the central reservation, concrete barriers and all of that. I am not saying there aren't good things in smart motorways. What I am proposing would not cost a lot at all, and I believe it should be a political priority.

Q152 **Ruth Cadbury:** Mr Dangerfield, National Highways is spending £950 million on Project Rapid to provide 6,000 rapid charge points across the SRN. Will it be enough to allay range anxiety among drivers on longer journeys and encourage uptake of more EVs? Are 6,000 enough? Will the power levels be sufficient for seriously quick charging for people who can only afford to stop for a few minutes?

Guy Dangerfield: The honest answer is that it is not yet clear whether that will be sufficient, given what we know about reticence to change to an EV, not so much because of the fear of range but because of the need



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to stop and the time penalty in doing so and that sort of thing, but it sounds like a very good start. Ensuring that there is power supply capacity to motorway service areas seems to us a sensible thing to be doing. I suspect that more and more will need to be added, but as battery range continues, in 20 or 30 years' time how many people will need to stop in the course of a long journey? Our view is that it is a sensible thing to be doing given the uncertainty in the area.

Q153 Ruth Cadbury: Do you think there is lumpiness in the provision at motorway service areas? Do you think waiting for that to be improved through competition between providers is the way to go, or should the Government be more proactive?

Guy Dangerfield: Some of the proposals that OZEV consulted on last year seem very sensible to us, and we would encourage that those are introduced as soon as possible. One of the things that we will be doing later this year is introducing a customer satisfaction survey of charging experience on the strategic road network, and through that we hope to contribute to the private sector desire to be at the top of the league table rather than the bottom.

Q154 Ruth Cadbury: Mr King, is there anything you would like to add?

Edmund King: Yes. I would not be so optimistic. I have been driving electric cars for 20 years. I currently drive an electric car. At the moment, just 2% of cars are electric. Often, when I am at a motorway service area fighting for a charger, I look around and say to myself, "Gosh, when 15% of these cars are electric, I am going to need more than 12 chargers. I am going to need more than 20."

Q155 Ruth Cadbury: What do you think is needed to roll out more chargers?

Edmund King: We have to start planning now. National Grid tries to reassure us that it can put it in with advance planning. The deadline of 2030 is only seven years away, so we need to ramp this up. The other thing on charging that we need to do—there are some regulations—is to make the chargers more accessible for disabled drivers and elderly drivers. The cables on a lot of the older chargers are high up and heavy, and I know that is something Motability has been working on with BSI. We need to do that and make them more accessible. We certainly need a lot more.

I agree with Guy that range will get better. There are some American EVs like the Lucid that have a range of 500 miles, but it is still an extremely expensive car. It will still take time. Yes, I do 98% of my charging at home, but if I do a journey there and back of 260 miles, I need to charge somewhere, and that is just 2%. We definitely need more infrastructure.

Q156 Ruth Cadbury: For the logistics sector, charging en route will be more vital. Are the Government doing enough, and are they doing it fast enough, Ms Kindleysides?



Sharon Kindleysides: I don't think so. I want to add another point about resilience. As Edmund mentioned, on smart motorways, when you have a power outage, it is quite bad. If you have a power outage and you only have a single source of failure to a motorway service station, it can be catastrophic. Along with thinking about this, we need to make sure that there is at least dual supply coming in.

With regard to haulage, we are not sure how it is going to work yet. HGVs are still at quite an early stage; we are working out how it will work. We will probably need more charging points because we are talking about drivers' hours and where lorry drivers stop and overnight, and how we make sure that they are catered for. I am not sure how many petrol pumps there are on a single stretch of motorway, but I am inclined to think it might be more than 6,000.

Q157 **Ruth Cadbury:** Of course, logistics is not just HGVs.

Sharon Kindleysides: Absolutely.

Q158 **Ruth Cadbury:** It is light vans and vehicles. Mr Walker?

Jonathan Walker: I endorse what has gone before and refer back to my earlier point. It is likely that where we end up in a zero-emissions logistics sector will be a mixture of fuelling and power options, be that hydrogen, electric or other technologies such as hybrids, and therefore that needs to be considered. There is some good work. There are trials and there is funding. I therefore urge Government, as we look at resilient future road strategies, that they do not happen in isolation.

Also on the resilience point—this is feedback we have heard from elsewhere—I totally support the point about power outages, and about the fundamental maintenance of charging points so that drivers, particularly those who are operating on tight timescales like van drivers doing multi-drops, can turn up and find that the charger is actually working when they get there.

Guy Dangerfield: That is the sort of thing that we hope our survey will put a real focus on—the basic maintenance of the stuff.

Chair: Before we wrap up, Greg and Gavin both have a quick supplementary.

Q159 **Greg Smith:** I have a brief supplementary, largely off the back of what you just said, Jonathan, about other fuels. Of course, battery electric is the current fad. It may well turn out to be the Betamax of technology. As we look at RIS3 and upgrades to the strategic road network, is enough being done on other potential fuels—hydrogen supply, on-site green hydrogen generation—in service areas?

The technology question is not over yet. Companies such as Toyota are dual tracking battery electric alongside hydrogen technologies. Indeed, in the haulage sector, battery electric is very much the minor player



HOUSE OF COMMONS

compared to hydrogen technologies, synthetic fuels, biofuels and so on. How much more should the Government be doing in these schemes to ensure that those technologies are as important as trying to put in more charging?

Jonathan Walker: More is my answer. They absolutely need to be considered. We believe hydrogen will have a significant role to play. There is a wider point beyond RIS3 and the road network. Nationally, as a country we need to decide what we are going to do with hydrogen and what hydrogen is going to be for. Is it going to be for fuel? Is it going to be for heating? Is it going to be for other parts of industry? Where is the supply coming from?

It goes back to my previous points about this being considered holistically as part of a wider strategy. Currently industry is experimenting; it is trying. Many of our members are engaging with various trials and pilots, but what is not there is certainty to invest in the long term. The real danger is that, in a global marketplace for vehicles, if other countries commit and steal a march, even if we as a country decide hydrogen is going to be the option for our freight fleet, we may struggle to find the vehicles because of demand and supply issues.

Edmund King: We are trialling a hydrogen fuel cell patrol vehicle in the west midlands from our Oldbury office, but we cannot take it any further than that because where we charge it is there.

Greg Smith: There are only five stations.

Edmund King: And there are only five stations. It is kind of chicken and egg. We cannot have those vehicles everywhere because we cannot refuel them.

Chair: Thank you. Lastly, Gavin.

Q160 **Gavin Newlands:** Further to the answers on a couple of points that Ruth was making, there was a debate in Westminster Hall last week, I think, on electric vehicles, and the Minister said that they were on track to reach 300,000 chargers by 2030. Last year, 7,680 chargers were installed. If that increases by a third each year, theoretically 300,000 can be reached by the end of 2030, not so much by 2030, but that is backloading it so much that about 75,000 chargers a year are going to be installed by the end. Is that feasible in any way, shape or form? Are the Government, given both their stringent targets of 300,000 and to decarbonise, relying overly on the private sector to deliver that target?

Regarding the VAT equality issue, would you agree that VAT should be levied at the same rate for on-street charging or strategic road network charging as for those of us who are lucky enough to charge our EVs at home? There are three points, but perhaps you can give a quick answer.

Jonathan Walker: I will try to give a quick answer. The Government have a significant role to play in supporting and encouraging the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

development of charging points. It is worth saying as well, talking about the issue of certainty, that if industry sees Government and other parts of the public sector committing to investing in charging points, and it is confident in the network, it will invest more. I do not just mean the freight industry; I mean companies with car fleets and things like that. It is doable, but we will have to shift to do it.

Sharon Kindleysides: Two points: we have to make sure that we have enough electricians around. As we all know, it is hard enough at the moment to get an electrician. If they are all out fitting EV charging points, it is going to be quite tricky. The other point is that, particularly in an urban environment, there are still low-key planning and regulatory requirements, and that slows things up. If you are putting in an EV charging point and there are certain criteria, perhaps you should not have to pay whatever it is you have to pay to the local council to get it approved. There are a couple of practical issues, but it will be going some to get them in.

Edmund King: I would stress that the emphasis should be on the 40% who do not have off-street parking. There should be more community charging and lamp post charging. It can be slower charging, because if you can park overnight you do not need a rapid charger. Sometimes, there is a bit of an obsession with charging at 350 kilowatts. That is great, but you do not often need it, because you leave your car overnight. The community charging element needs to be ramped up, and I think Government support there could help.

Guy Dangerfield: The point that was just made is important: if the supply is there, the private sector will probably come along and do the actual chargers. Getting the power supply to the places where people want to charge is crucial.

Q161 **Gavin Newlands:** You are all nodding. Would you all agree that VAT should be equalised between home charging and on-street charging?

Edmund King: I do. It is unfair that I can charge at home with 5% VAT whereas my neighbour down the road has to charge on the street and pay 20% VAT.

Gavin Newlands: Likewise, I agree.

Chair: Thank you to our first panel of witnesses for your evidence this session.