



Department
for Transport

From the Parliamentary
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Iain Stewart MP
Chair of the Transport Committee
House of Commons
London
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27 March 2024

Dear Iain,

Thank you for inviting me to provide oral evidence to the Transport Committee on 24 January for its inquiry into the work of National Highways. During the hearing, I committed to write to the Committee with further evidence. This letter is my response. I apologise for the delay in issuing this response.

Smart Motorways

I was asked about the actions being taken by National Highways on smart motorways and the public confidence in them. It is hugely important for drivers to feel safe on our roads and we recognise that some drivers are less confident when driving on smart motorways. That is why we are investing £900 million in further safety improvements to smart motorways already in operation.

National Highways is working at pace to deliver these improvements. For example, stopped vehicle detection technology was rolled out on existing All Lane Running motorways by the end of September 2022, six months ahead of the original delivery date. National Highways is also on track to deliver the Government commitment of constructing over 150 additional emergency areas by March 2025. Details of the National Emergency Area Retrofit programme can be found on National Highways' website.

<https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-work/smart-motorways-evidence-stocktake/national-emergency-area-retrofit/>

I wrote to the Committee in December 2023 to highlight the publication of several reports that relate to smart motorways including the latest safety data.

I have listed the four publications below, along with the website address of each one. I hope this is useful to the Committee.

- Smart Motorways stocktake: Third year progress report, National Highways: [smart-motorways-third-year-progress-report-final.pdf \(nationalhighways.co.uk\)](https://www.nationalhighways.co.uk/smart-motorways-third-year-progress-report-final.pdf)
- Smart motorways – scheme safety Before versus After Assessment, national Highways [before-vs-after-safety-analysis-for-all-smart-motorways-final.pdf \(nationalhighways.co.uk\)](https://www.nationalhighways.co.uk/before-vs-after-safety-analysis-for-all-smart-motorways-final.pdf)
- Second annual assessment of safety performance on the strategic road network, ORR: [Second annual assessment of safety performance on the strategic road network \(orr.gov.uk\)](https://www.orr.gov.uk/second-annual-assessment-of-safety-performance-on-the-strategic-road-network)
- Safety perceptions on smart motorways: the driver view, Transport Focus: [Safety perceptions on smart motorways - the driver view \(d3cez36w5wymxj.cloudfront.net\)](https://d3cez36w5wymxj.cloudfront.net/safety-perceptions-on-smart-motorways-the-driver-view.pdf)

A1 in Northumberland – Morpeth to Ellingham

The Committee asked about the environmental impacts for the A1 Morpeth to Ellingham. The Secretary of State has set a new deadline of 5 June 2024, for a decision on the application for a development consent order. I hope you understand that I cannot provide any further comment, as this is a live planning case. However, I would refer the Committee to the National Infrastructure Planning website, where all the available information on this application is held (<https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/TR010059>).

Roads Reform

I was asked for my reflections on roads reform and if I feel they have come to fruition in the way National Highways is currently operating. Government set out the reforms to our motorways and major roads in 2015. Since then, road investment has been on a firmer footing, with financial certainty provided by the 5-year funding cycle and National Highways gaining operational autonomy and flexibility as a government-owned company. The reforms put a good system in place, with a clear vision, and stable, long-term planning for National Highways alongside holding them to account for performance, and independent assessment by ORR. This was recognised by independent evaluation in 2022, which found that the reforms “have been effective in improving how the strategic road network is managed, and that they have had positive effects on value for money and road users’ experience”. We continue to work, with National Highways and ORR to improve how National Highways operate, including recommendations from this Committee. The reforms can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/roads-reform> and the evaluation of roads reform can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-roads-reform>.

National Highways will also be writing to you following the hearing. I hope this additional evidence is helpful to the Committee.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Guy Opperman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

GUY OPPERMAN MP

MINISTER FOR ROADS AND LOCAL TRANSPORT