



Mr Iain Stewart MP
Chair of the Transport Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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Dear Mr Stewart

Follow-up to oral evidence session 21 February 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide oral evidence to the Committee on Wednesday 21 February 2024 as part of your inquiry into the future of transport data. National Highways recognises that data enables our customers, stakeholders, supply chain partners and ourselves to make better decisions so we can continue to connect the country safely and reliably, enabling economic prosperity and a thriving environment.

I committed to write to you on a couple of issues raised during the session, my responses to which are set out below. I hope this additional information is useful to the Committee – please do let me know if I can help further.

Q93/94. Example of where using data has led to an earlier intervention that was less disruptive and less costly.

National Highways puts the customer at the centre of our data strategy, which means that we are focussed on using data to improve safety and road-user experience, as well as delivering more efficiently for the taxpayer.

National Highways used to routinely schedule overnight road and lane closures across the country between the hours of 9pm-6am. We have now created a data set (a supervised learning regressor) called Optimised Working Windows (OWW), which uses predicted traffic flows to guide decisions on when to deploy traffic management on the Strategic Road Network (SRN). Our goal is to minimise delays that our customers and users of the SRN experience, and the OWW helps us to minimise congestion, drive efficient delivery and support safe access for roadworkers. OWW is expected to generate circa £33.5m in efficiency over the second Roads Period (2020-2025) through improving maintenance productivity.

We have developed a “Single View of the Network” to enable us to have reliable, fit-for-purpose information about the operation of the SRN through a single platform. This combines data feeds from disparate sources and enables our colleagues to easily access all available data in one place, improving the speed and accuracy of decision making. This supports incident detection and resolution, keeping traffic flowing smoothly. We are creating an analytical solution to predict the impact of events (e.g. football matches) on traffic flow. This enables our colleagues to take a more pre-emptive approach to network management. We have also launched a trial to understand how third-party data might be used to improve the service we provide to our customers. In particular, we are exploring opportunities to use crowd-sourced incident data from Waze to reduce delays caused by congestion and improve incident clearance times. The lessons and outcomes from these trials will form an integral part of our future company-wide Digital Twin, which will further improve our ability to oversee and manage the network.

Q108. Is greater value given to some data sets than others during the appraisal of investment decisions?

National Highways’ approach to appraisal is consistent with both the HM Treasury’s Green Book and the Department for Transport’s Transport Appraisal Guidance (TAG) documentation. We cover all likely impacts (economic, environmental, and social) when assessing “value for money” of a proposed investment. This provides a holistic view of the impacts of any given intervention, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the value to the public purse, and to demonstrate we are managing public money responsibly and effectively.

We draw on a robust, substantive body of both qualitative and quantitative data to ensure decisions are made on an objective evidence base. This includes verified road safety data, traffic demand data and data sets from organisations like the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR).

Q112. Is the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) analysis process bureaucratic? Is there anything that could be done to make it more efficient and to make it easier to get some of these decisions moving down the line and the investment happening?

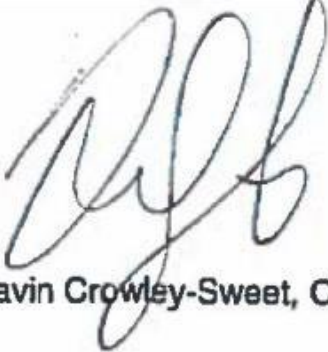
We believe the BCR process is proportionate and appropriate. A core principle of National Highways’ Value for Money approach is that it is proportionate to the scale of investment being proposed (this is consistent with guidance in both HM Treasury’s Green Book and the Department for Transport’s TAG). From the perspective of managing public money, BCRs represent a more efficient use of taxpayer money to achieve, and demonstrate we have achieved, the right outcomes first time.

Q117: We have received some written evidence from the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) making some criticisms of National Highways on the quality of data and the failure to deliver an asset data governance plan. Can you tell us what measures National Highways is putting in place to address those?

We welcome the insight and challenge from the ORR. National Highways is continuously reviewing and seeking to improve our approach to asset management. We have recently achieved accreditation to the international standard for asset management (ISO55001:2014) that demonstrates the effectiveness of improvements we have made in our management systems. We continue to work closely with the ORR and will ensure they are fully sighted on our plans to deliver further improvements.

If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your sincerely



Davin Crowley-Sweet, Chief Data Officer