

Written evidence submitted by National Highways (RDF0027)

National Highways

National Highways (formerly Highways England) is the government-owned company responsible for operating, maintaining and improving England's motorways and major A-roads, the Strategic Road Network (SRN).

Our network is integral to our customers' journeys and is the backbone of the country's economy, moving more freight than all other transport modes put together. Our operational services help our customers – the public, business users, freight hauliers, local communities and partners – travel safely and efficiently on one of the most highly used networks in Europe.

The Strategic Road Network

The SRN is an important part of our national infrastructure. Our motorways and major A-roads link towns, cities and regions across England and help to connect the Union.

Our roads provide direct access to every part of the country. They connect our economic regions, people with employment, businesses with international gateways vital for trade, and they boost the construction and maintenance supply chain. Our network also plays an important social role, bringing people together and connecting communities and regions.

The UK has some of the safest roads in the world. The number of road deaths per million inhabitants is lower in the UK than in almost every country within Europe.

- The SRN carries over four million journeys every day, with 95 billion miles travelled on our roads each year.
- More people use our network than any other form of transport.
- The SRN carries three times more people than the UK rail network, and accounts for 34% of all road traffic and 68% of all heavy goods vehicle journeys by distance.
- Sectors heavily reliant on the SRN employ 7.4 million people and contribute £314 billion to the UK economy.

National Highways' work and the performance of the SRN is highly relevant to the freight sector. Our submission sets out more detail on our work in these areas:

- Predictable, reliable and safe journeys for road freight and hauliers.
- Preparing for the future, including meeting growing demand, utilising technology and investing in the SRN.
- Working with the freight industry.

Predictable, reliable and safe journeys

A safe and free-flowing SRN is vital for the country and for the freight sector. In Road Investment Strategy 2 (2020-2025)¹ we will be investing £24 billion in the SRN, which includes operating and maintaining our existing infrastructure across the country, as well as delivering road enhancements projects.

We are working closely with the freight sector as part of our day to day management of the network, and have established the following to help deliver better journeys for road freight:

Enhancing roadworks information across our network

To minimise the impact of planned closures on freight customers:

- We have improved the way in which we keep operators informed by publishing a daily [online road closure report](#), in addition to a week-ahead closure report that is emailed directly to freight operators each day.
- We work closely with local authorities, police and the freight sector to ensure that suitable diversion routes are available in the event of planned or unplanned disruption to the SRN.
- Funding is available, via our Users and Communities designated fund, for schemes to undertake surveys to establish freight movement patterns and ensure we consult with the right stakeholders when undertaking works.
- We use digital mapping systems to ensure that we fully understand the impact of planned roadworks on key freight routes and around freight hubs, depots and warehouses.

Maximising capacity on key routes at key times

- We consult with the freight sector to identify key dates in their calendar when demand for the movement of goods is expected to be highest on certain routes.
- These dates include Black Friday, Cyber Monday and the lead up to Christmas.

- During these periods we remove roadworks wherever we can safely do so to maximise the capacity available for road freight.

Clearing incidents quickly and safely

- We know that incidents on the SRN cause delay to freight customers.
- Our primary focus is on minimising the likelihood of an incident.
- However, when an incident does take place, it is vital that we are able to re-open the road quickly and safely, for the benefit of all road-users, including freight.
- As set out in our [Strategic Business Plan 2020-2025](#), we have a key performance indicator to clear 86% of incidents within one hour. In 2020–21, we cleared 88.6% of motorway incidents within one hour, based on 24-hour coverage.
- All freight operators are also encouraged to register to receive our ‘*National Incident Liaison Officer*’ reports.
- This free of charge service ensures that freight operators are informed in real-time of incidents on the network that could impact journey time and reliability.

Reducing delays through roadworks

- After extensive research and consultation, including with the freight sector, we have increased the speed limit through roadworks on the SRN to 60mph wherever it is safe to do so.
- This is good for non-freight journeys, as it enables drivers to safely pass lorries, which are limited to travelling at 56mph.
- This measure also safely improves journey times for freight.

Operation Brock

- Operation Brock is our contribution to the Kent Resilience Forum’s plan to keep Kent moving by making sure traffic can continue to use the M20 when there is disruption to travel across the English Channel.
- Operation Brock, which can be set up overnight if there are delays at the Channel ports, keeps port-bound HGVs on the coastbound carriageway where their journey to Eurotunnel or the Port of Dover can be managed. By quickly installing a temporary contraflow on the London bound carriageway, all other traffic can still use the M20 in both directions, keeping local roads in Kent moving.

Preparing for the future

It is estimated that road freight contributed £13.6 billion² to the UK economy in 2019, prior to COVID. Road continues to be the main mode for transporting freight across the UK, carrying nearly 80% of domestic freight in 2020.³ A significant proportion of businesses are, and are likely to remain, heavily reliant on the SRN. Collectively these SRN-reliant sectors employ more than 7.4 million people and contribute over £314 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) to England's economy⁴.

The COVID travel restrictions saw a temporary decline in social and commuting journeys on the SRN. At the same time, we saw an increase in freight journeys above the normal level, in line with an increase in demand for goods bought online.

We expect a continued increase in demand for road freight journeys in the short, medium and long-term. It is essential to prepare the SRN now to ensure that we can meet that demand for increased capacity on key routes, exploit the benefits and opportunities and support the government's ambition on net zero.

Maintaining and improving the SRN

We know that keeping the SRN operating safely and free-flowing is important for all road freight journeys today. As well as the day to day to operational activities outlined above, we are also working to prepare the network for the future by:

- Investing £10.8 billion (2020-2025) in keeping our roads, structures and assets safe, well-maintained and operating efficiently.
- Driving nearly £1 billion (2020-2025) of improvements through our designated funds on projects that will have wider benefits for customer, communities, the environment and the economy.
- Consulting stakeholders to prepare for Road Period 3 (2025-2030) and planning for a network that meets the needs of the country, our customers (including freight) and neighbouring communities.
- Delivering a portfolio of road enhancement schemes on our motorways and major A-roads.

The government's Road Investment Strategy 2 (RIS2) set out the infrastructure delivery programme for National Highways between 2020 and 2025. RIS2 is a balanced portfolio of small-scale improvements to the network and larger, more transformational projects, such as the Lower Thames Crossing. Road enhancements at either end of this scale can deliver significant benefits to freight, either by enhancing a key corridor, such as on the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon, or by alleviating congestion at a known pinch point.

Case study: Lower Thames Crossing

For almost 60 years the Dartford Crossing has stood as the only crossing between Kent and Essex. As one of the UK's most important strategic roads, the crossing is a critical link carrying vital food, goods and services between the country's key manufacturing centres, distribution hubs and ports. Yet despite having a total design capacity of 135,000 vehicles a day, the crossing now carries more than 180,000 on its busiest days.

The demand on the Strategic Road Network and the Dartford Crossing remained high throughout the pandemic. Goods vehicles travelling through the crossing continued to play a vital role moving essential goods to supermarkets and homes.

The strategic importance of the Dartford Crossing is increasing and now supports the change in working and shopping patterns in England. 42% of vehicles using the Dartford Crossing are now goods vehicles, up from 33% in 2019. December 2020 saw the busiest day ever recorded for HGV traffic, which is now consistently above 2019 levels.

The need to tackle the capacity issue is greater than ever, which the proposed Lower Thames Crossing seeks to address. Consisting of the longest road tunnel in the UK between north Kent and south Essex, the Lower Thames Crossing will include 14.3 miles of new road linking the M2/A2, A13 and M25. By almost doubling road capacity across the River Thames east of London, it will provide national road freight with a reliable new connection. The proposed new crossing will create new opportunities to link people and jobs, businesses and customers.

The Lower Thames Crossing is predicted to reduce the number of HGVs at the Dartford Crossing, as it would provide a more attractive route for many vehicles travelling to and from manufacturing centres, distribution hubs and

ports. The tunnel will accommodate all sizes of vehicle expected to use it, including double decker vehicles. This will reduce the requirement to convoy oversized vehicles, which currently causes delay and disruption at the Dartford Crossing.

Network performance and future priorities

National Highways is working closely with government to develop an authoritative evidence base that will underpin investment choices in future road periods.

- We are analysing the performance of 17 key routes that connect the country through our [‘Vision for route strategies’](#).
- By considering priorities for future investment along routes, rather than locations and regions, we are able to consider end to end journeys more effectively and build a better understanding of where investment could deliver the most benefit.
- This approach is particularly relevant to freight, which often moves along known road corridors between international gateways and strategic domestic locations, such as logistics hubs, warehouses and distribution centres.
- The freight industry is a key stakeholder in the development of our route strategies.
- We continue to work closely with the freight sector to understand their future needs for the SRN.
- Although high-quality road infrastructure is essential to meet future demand for road freight, we recognise the importance of integrated transport solutions.
- We have been working with Network Rail to strengthen our joint planning approach, as outlined in the case study below.

Case study: Solent to Midlands strategic freight study

In July 2021, National Highways and Network Rail jointly published a [‘Solent to the Midlands Multimodal Freight Strategy – Phase 1’](#). The strategy is the culmination of a year’s work between the two organisations and represents a further step forward in the collaboration between National Highways and Network Rail in multimodal strategic planning and other areas to better serve our customers.

This study forms part of Network Rail's Long-Term Planning Process and National Highways' Route Strategy and Pioneer Projects work, both of which are designed to identify investment priorities for the future. This closer approach to planning and increased involvement of stakeholders is vital to delivering the best results for our customers and funders.

Key findings include:

- Roads are critical to complete the door to door journeys for shorter distances, such as regional and local movements or the last mile from a rail freight interchange. Rail is most cost effective over longer distances and for higher loads.
- Rail and road both have similar reliability in terms of journey times, key for freight consumers where much freight is time dependent.
- Modal shift to rail provides an opportunity to free up road capacity on the Solent to Midlands corridor, especially for those journeys that are greater than 50 miles and greater than 100 miles for bulk and consumer goods respectively.
- The Solent to the Midlands route is one of the most important freight corridors in the UK. It links the major port of Southampton with the numerous distribution centres and economic hubs of the Midlands, North and Scotland. The Solent Ports, particularly Southampton, are in favourable locations for connections to the global freight and logistics market due to their proximity to the main shipping lanes. The Midlands is home to a high concentration of large distribution centres and warehouses – the so-called 'Golden Triangle' of freight distribution.
- The A34, managed by National Highways, links the Solent Ports and the Midlands and is closely mirrored by the equivalent rail route, owned and operated by Network Rail. The parallel nature of the road and rail routes means that it is an ideal candidate for cross-modal analysis.

Next steps include:

- Continued collaboration between Network Rail and National Highways to develop the strategy for this important corridor and to look at other areas that would benefit from joint working to provide an improved service for customers.
- Removal of the barriers to rail freight growth needed to enable the increased freight flows out of the Solent.
- Unlocking new markets for rail freight.

- Decarbonisation of freight movements and the road freight system.

Lorry parking and facilities

We recognise that people are at the heart of the freight sector and keep the country moving. We understand the vital importance of lorry parking and high-quality rest facilities that provide a safe and comfortable environment for hauliers to safely break their journey on the SRN.

Whilst National Highways does not have statutory responsibility for providing lorry parking, we are committed to play our part in tackling the current shortage of suitable facilities.

We are considering how our land holdings can be used to provide additional parking spaces nationwide. We are also encouraging the inclusion of new facilities as part of local authorities' Local Plans and within large industrial developments.

We continue to work with government to explore what additional support National Highways could provide.

Net zero

We published our ['Net zero highways: 2030/2040/2050'](#) plan earlier this year. The plan includes a number of commitments and initiatives that are relevant to freight and recognises that:

Britain relies on roads today

- Many see cars as a problem, but roads and cars are an integral part of our transport system.
- 80% of families own a car today, almost nine out of ten passenger miles are travelled by road and 79% of freight goods move by road (Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2020).
- Road travel provides a convenient, low cost and practical way to travel to see family, to travel to work and to deliver goods around the UK.

Road travel will decarbonise fast

- Road travel represents a higher carbon way to travel in the UK today, but this is changing fast.
- Already, government has indicated that sale of new petrol and diesel cars will be phased out by 2030.

- The Government's Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain (2021) puts Britain on a trajectory to do the same for heavy goods vehicles from 2040.
- The future of road travel is a zero carbon one, powered by renewable electricity, hydrogen and biofuels.

A net zero Britain will still travel by road in 2050

- We support investment in all zero carbon transport options, however, investment in other forms of transport, such as rail, will make only a limited impact on how Britain moves.
- The Committee on Climate Change forecasts that traffic levels will be higher than today in 2050, even taking account of the ambitious actions in its Sixth Carbon Budget, which we support.

Investment in Britain's roads supports a thriving net zero economy

- Today every £1 investment in the strategic road network returns over £2 to the economy.
- Our roads directly support sectors which employ 7.4 million people in the UK and contribute £314 billion in Gross Value Added to the economy.
- The industries that rely on the road network are expected to grow by 35% by 2030, which will generate an additional £110 billion of UK growth.

Zero carbon HGVs

Around one-third of emissions from the SRN currently come from HGVs. The Department for Transport's *'Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain (2021)'* phases out non-zero emissions trucks from 2040. There are a number of potential alternative fuels and techniques under consideration, including hydrogen, batteries and in-road charging networks.

As set out in our net zero plan, we will take the following actions:

- Use our well-established network and relationship with national strategic road authorities to share the lessons and insights from global HGV charging trials in Spring 2022. We will annually report on global progress and lessons from global trials and roll out of zero emissions trucks.
- Recommend a first tranche of zero carbon HGV trials to DfT that meet the requirements of freight operators, meet safety standards and build

on existing trials already taking place across the world by the end of 2022.

- By 2023 report to Government on how National Highways can help to reduce empty lorry movements.
- Continue to support government's zero emissions HGV trials and developing policy on zero carbon HGVs during this road period (2025).
- Recommend a preferred solution for HGVs and investment plan for implementation in the fourth road period.
- Incentivise our supply chain to be early adopters of zero carbon HGV technologies by only supplying our construction sites with zero carbon vehicles from 2040.

National Highways is supporting the Department for Transport's '*Zero Emission Road Freight Trial*' feasibility studies. These studies are investigating the viability of both hydrogen fuel cells and electric road systems for large HGVs and we are providing advice and asset information to the study teams. Safety is our number one priority and we are working with the Department for Transport to identify potential risks and measures to address them, as the studies develop.

Working with the freight industry

The freight sector is one of our key customer groups. A free-flowing, safe SRN that offers efficient, predictable and reliable journeys is key to logistics and freight organisations across the country, as well as the businesses that rely on these services.

To help serve the needs of our freight customers we convene a quarterly Freight Forum, with representatives from a number of haulage and logistics organisations.

Our Freight and Roadside Facilities team have established a Professional Driver Experience Panel to provide detailed insight from freight drivers on our network. We are using Transport Focus' Logistics and Coach Managers Survey to improve the service we provide to businesses.

Through our engagement with freight customers we are continuing to build our understanding of the sector's needs and priorities. Areas of focus include improving the provision of lorry parking, communicating and working with the sector and understanding key freight movements on our network.

Our dedicated Commercial Incident Prevention Team provides free, professionally certified training modules to freight partners on a range of issues including tyre checks, consequences of poor loading, blind spots and diesel spillage best practice.

We also provide free [road safety guidance](#) to freight organisations, which includes guidance for driving on England's motorways (translated into 15 languages), tailgating, seatbelts and safely securing heavy loads.

December 2021

Endnotes

¹ The government sets the objectives and funding for National Highways through a periodic Road Investment Strategy (RIS), which covers a five-year Road Period. In response, National Highways publishes a Strategic Business Plan and Delivery Plan setting out how it will deliver the RIS. The first RIS was published in 2014 and applied to the first Road Period, 2015 to 2020. RIS2 was published in March 2020 and applied to the second Road Period, 2020 to 2025.

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1006792/domestic-road-freight-statistics-2020.pdf

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/tsgb04-freight#domestic-freight-transport>

⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/600275/m160503_the_road_to_growth_Our_strategic_economic_growth_plan.pdf