

Response from Birmingham Friends of the Earth**1. The role of the Strategic Road Network (SRN)**

Currently the SRN is formed from two fundamentally different road types, Motorways and Principal Trunk Roads. The former are routes that have been constructed as wholly new highway provision, the latter are long standing existing roads connecting villages, towns and cities, that have been upgraded by means of some new lengths (generally badged as bypass) and by removal of conflicts through rationalisation of junctions with minor roads, on line widening.

Use of motorways is restricted by bye-law to motorised vehicle meeting certain standards in terms of type and speed, mix of speed being one of the determinants of capacity as well as likelihood of collision. This motorway categorisation should be maintained.

Like any transport mode, roads have an impact on the people and places around them arising from both the infrastructure itself and the vehicles using it. Investment and innovation in the use of green infrastructure and new technology open up opportunities for minimising the impacts of both these elements. These opportunities include the use of modern road surfaces and place-sensitive planting of vegetation, adoption of low emission and connected vehicles, encouraging vehicle sharing and active travel modes and, in some cases, avoiding the need for travel altogether.

Demand for the SRN is affected by a range of demographic, economic, lifestyle, technological, and resource factors. When thinking about how these factors may affect patterns of use when deciding where to prioritise investment to ensure the SRN meets today's demands, not those of the past, and is ready for a range of possible future scenarios. In appraising RIS2, Highways England's Regional Traffic Models and the then most recent assessment of future demand scenarios, Road Traffic Forecasts 2018, was used. For RIS3 this approach must be entirely rejected as it flies in the face of logic; not only can the British public not switch to some sort of 25 hour day to make available the extra time for endlessly growing travel, but also the climate crisis has to be addressed.

Overall trip rates for the majority of trip purposes have been declining and there is a trend of more young people not learning to drive. It is essential that these trends continue out to 2050 and to achieve this, the SRN shall not be considered in isolation from other transport modes. We reject the assumption that these changes that would reduce demand would be outweighed by the increase in journeys made by older drivers.

We believe that Trunk roads should be treated in a different manner from motorways; trunk roads accommodate a broader range of traffic types than motorways. The physical form of trunk roads needs to be made more consistent, and current lack of provision for other users, needs to be reversed. Only in recent

years has online widening given consideration to farm traffic, for instance, but older schemes have failed to do so. It is still a shortcoming of trunk roads that pedestrians and cyclists are often not provided for. We suggest that for each and every mile of trunk road there should be a metalled path, preferably parallel to but not immediately adjacent to a traffic lane.

If the principal purpose of the SRN is to enable safe, reliable, predictable, rapid, often long distance, journeys of both people (whether as drivers or passengers) and goods in England between our:

- Main centres of population;
- Major ports, airports and rail terminals;
- Geographically peripheral regions of England; and
- Chief cross-border routes to Scotland and Wales.

Then there has to be evidence that the local authorities that would be affected by the SRN have produced road traffic strategies that reduce the burden of road traffic on their areas and also reduce traffic on the SRN. Reviews of these strategies should be published annually with achieved traffic levels versus actual traffic levels published. The RIS3 applies to the SRN of England only. 2021 policies of both Wales and Scotland are for reduction in road traffic in line with their policies; no increased volumes of traffic are to be delivered to those administrations in order to respect their authority.

Connections to the local road network, in particular the Major Road Network (MRN), are critical for allowing access for most SRN users to or from specific locations. Such connections must balance the needs of local access and the wider ability of the network to function safely and effectively for long-distance traffic. The MRN are Principal roads that although designated as 'Major Road' by National Highways, are funded and maintained by local highway authorities.

2. The future of the Strategic Road Network (SRN)

Governance

It is envisaged that no major improvements, such as has been undertaken in RIS1 with the upgrade of the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon, shall be undertaken. The SRN shall be rendered more effective by a reduction in road traffic, as is consistent with climate change strategy.

By 2050 the role of the SRN shall be fully integrated with other Government strategy and shall have reporting lines to policies on mitigation on climate change and on Net Carbon Zero. A strategy shall be set that prioritises journeys that cannot be made other than by long distance road transport. Acknowledging

that the SRN is the suitable route for freight carried by freight, road charging shall be agreed with local highway authorities to ensure that unsuitable loads do not pass along less suitable alternative routes even where those are physically shorter.

By 2050, measures shall have been undertaken to ensure the SRN is resilient to climate change and incidents, such as flooding, poor weather conditions, blockages on connecting transport networks.

By 2050, high-quality routes shall have been provided for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians, so that they can make their journeys safely, physically separated from motorised traffic on the SRN. These routes to use a variety of methods appropriate to the needs of users, are attractive both for work and leisure travel, and respectful of place.

By 2050, the role of the SRN shall have expanded to ensuring that each and every Principal Trunk Road shall have a public passenger transport daily service that integrates with complements the local public transport at and near SRN junctions.

The Department's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy and Cycling and Walking Safety Review highlight the importance placed on making these modes of travel more attractive for people so they become the first choice for short journeys.

Transport Focus research has identified the priorities of non-motorised users and recommended steps that can help the network better meet their needs.

Investment in the SRN can support this agenda by improving cycling and walking provision along trunk 'A' roads, and reducing severance effects where local cycling and walking routes cross the SRN or are separated completely by it. Together with the Department's new future of mobility strategy, they are designed to promote mode shift and assist the transition to a greener and cleaner society.

In the long-term, our vision will mean that non-motorised users will be able to access good quality routes for their journeys segregated from an SRN that primarily serves long-distance, higher speed traffic. Provision for these users will be considered in plans for enhancements and major renewals to the network from the start, ensuring that all current users of the SRN benefit from investments.

In the immediate future, non-motorised users will in many places continue to share the same all-purpose trunk roads as other road users. While this remains the case, Highways England will:

- Maintain routes and facilities for non motorised users to be high quality, safe and direct.

- Make targeted improvements at problem locations, for example at junctions or other locations where there is a need to address safety issues, or where non motorised users are required to use the SRN for short distances to access rights of way on either side of the road.

There are also opportunities to reduce demand for the SRN by collaborating on the provision of local and active transport options. In relation to the local planning process, National Highways should continue to discharge its statutory role. Through RIS2 and National Highways s activities, as well as via other mechanisms and partners:

- Ensure the SRN is fit-for-purpose for long-distance traffic, and where possible provide alternatives for local traffic that can reduce the pressure on the SRN. This could include public transport in places where the SRN is already under heavy pressure.
- Strengthen the resilience of the whole transport network, seeking to reduce situations where people are dependent on a single SRN link, and instead find other transport options, whether other roads or modes, to address this.
- Help people consider their transport choices or need to travel through use of data and journey information, for example car-share schemes, promotion of public transport alternatives and fast broadband.
- Make good quality connections with the local road network, and support for local authorities, more central to the operations of Highways England, with some aspects of performance accountable to Office of Road and Rail (ORR).
- Support growth, by ensuring the existing SRN has reduced congestion through facilitating modal shift and traffic reduction
- Aid modal integration at our ports, canal and rail terminals.