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Strategic Road Network (SRN)

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Summary

This briefing paper provides information about the construction, enlargement, management and maintenance of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in England. Trunk roads in Wales and Scotland are managed by the Welsh Government and Transport Scotland, respectively and are not covered herein.

The SRN comprises approximately 4,300 miles of motorways and major 'trunk' A-roads in England, and it is managed by Highways England (HE), a company wholly owned by the Secretary of State for Transport. The new governance framework for HE comprises legislation, a licence document, a Framework Agreement, a Road Investment Strategy and Articles of Association, supported by relevant guidance and standards. This was legislated for in the *Infrastructure Act 2015.*

HE and its predecessor the Highways Agency is or were responsible for maintaining the SRN and for major projects associated with it, such as Labour's Targeted Programme of Improvements, the introduction of traffic officers and the growing phenomenon of 'smart motorways', which form a key part of the Roads Investment Strategy for 2015-21.

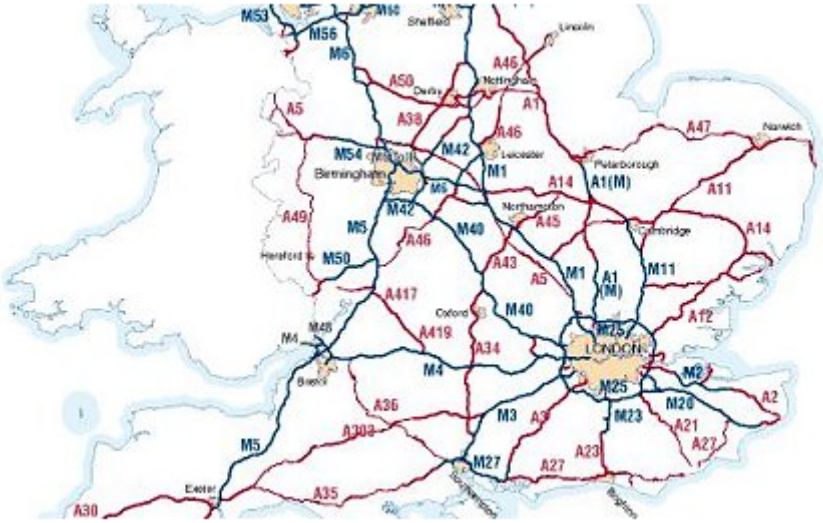
Since 1979 governments of all stripes have expanded the SRN; the pattern of investment and construction has broadly mirrored the fortunes of the economy. Trends in road building have come and gone: the prevailing 'predict and provide' orthodoxy of the 1980s gave way to a more considered approach in the mid-late 1990s, which has largely been with us ever since, of making the best use of the existing network and considering further development in light of environmental and health impacts.

After 2010 the Coalition Government moved from a cautious approach to road building, dictated to a great extent by fiscal constraints, to a more assertive approach that formed part of a wider National Infrastructure Plan of capital spending. The current Conservative Government seems likely to continue with this policy.

One of the persistent themes over the past thirty years has been the expectation of successive governments that there would be significant private investment in the SRN. This has emerged only to a limited extent. This is touched on in this note, but for full details see HC Library briefing paper SN442. Information on other roads-related matters can be found on the Roads Topical Page of the Parliament website.

1. Background: the strategic road network (SRN)

The Strategic Road Network (SRN) comprises approximately 4,300 miles of motorways and major 'trunk' A-roads in England, and it is managed by Highways England (HE).[1]



The length of the SRN represents only around two per cent of the total length of England's road network, but it carries roughly one-third of the total motor vehicle traffic in England.[2] The SRN expands as new roads and capacity are added and contracts as other roads are 'de-trunked' (i.e. devolved to local highways authorities).[3]

Successive governments have argued that the SRN is 'critical' to the UK's economy:

> While it only covers 2.6% of the road network in England, it covers 30% of all traffic and 60% of freight and business traffic. 85 billion vehicle miles were travelled in 2012 … DfT estimates that the direct cost to the UK economy of time lost due to congestion, on the SRN alone, is £2 billion a year and that this could rise to £10 billion a year by 2040.[4]

But that it has suffered from 'historic underinvestment'. Further, DfT traffic demand forecasts project an increase of 24 to 72 per cent in driving on the SRN by 2040, exacerbating existing problems of pollution and congestion (not everyone subscribes to this thesis – see 'peak car' below).

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[1] trunk roads in Wales and Scotland are managed by the Welsh Government and Traffic Scotland (on behalf of Transport Scotland), respectively

[2] DfT, *Use of the Strategic Road Network*, 14 August 2014

[3] on coming into office in 1997 the Labour Government thought that approximately 40 per cent of the then trunk road network could be devolved in this way [DETR, *A new deal for trunk roads in England*, July 1998, section 2.3]; by 2006 a little over 2,100 miles of the SRN had been de-trunked [HC Deb 27 November 2006, c274W]; a list of de-trunking orders made between 2004 and 2014 is available at HL Deb 1 July 2014, cc248-52WA

[4] DfT, *Roads reform: impact assessment*, IA DfT00251, October 2013, p6

2. Management and operation of the SRN

2.1 Highways England (HE)

Overview

Highways England (HE) is a body corporate, established on 8 December 2014 by incorporation under the *Companies Act 2006* as a company limited by shares. On 1 April 2015 it was appointed as a strategic highways company by the Secretary of State by way of an Order in accordance with section 1 of the *Infrastructure Act 2015*.[5] HE is the highway, street and traffic authority for the SRN. It is a separate legal entity from the Crown but, for national accounts purposes, is classified to the central government sector.[6]

On 1 April 2015 it assumed responsibility for the approximately 3,500 staff based in seven offices around the country (Dorking, Bedford, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and Exeter) and including a uniformed Traffic Officer service who serve in control centres and patrol key areas of the network. It is supported by the National Traffic Information Service, which provides information to the National Traffic Operations Centre and the seven regional control centres.[7] On 1 July 2015 Jim O'Sullivan became the Chief Executive of Highways England.[8]

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) is responsible for monitoring the performance of HE and Transport Focus champions the needs of road users on the SRN.

Transition from Highways Agency

The Highways Agency (HA) was an executive agency of the Department for Transport (DfT) It was created on 30 March 1994 and started operating the following month. It was initially announced by the then Secretary of State for Transport, John MacGregor, on 5 August 1993 as one of the Conservative Government's 'Next Steps' agencies.[9]

Cook Review

In the Autumn 2010 Spending Review the Coalition Government committed to a "full review to ensure that HA structure and governance give assurance of value for money".[10] In November 2011 Alan Cook, non-executive Chairman of the Highways Agency Board published his independent review of the SRN. He concluded that there was 'significant scope' for efficiencies of around £200 million a year after five years from maintenance and operations activities, following implementation of a programme to reform structures, relationships and

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[5] *Infrastructure Act 2015 (Commencement No. 1) Regulations 2015* (SI 2015/481)
[6] DfT, *Highways England: Framework Document*, April 2015, p6
[7] Highways England, *About Us* [accessed 10 August 2015]
[8] DfT press notice, "New Highways England Chief Executive announced", 18 June 2015
[9] more information on the genesis and history of the HA can be found in section 1 of HC Library briefing paper RP14-65
[10] HMT, *Spending Review 2010*, Cm 7942, October 2010, para 2.28

responsibilities.[11] His central recommendation was 'for a transformation in the management of the network':

> At the heart of this is a model that empowers and enables the network manager – with a new, independent Board – to make better, freer commercial decisions, with greater financial certainty and control, while being more closely aligned with local priorities and held much more robustly to account by the Government over its medium- to long-term performance. The DfT should lead the process of reshaping and forming the new independent Board, moving it away from its current advisory role to align it with commercial best practice. This should start with the formal selection of a non-executive Chairman and recruitment of industry leading non-executive Directors to outnumber, challenge and assess the executive teams' future delivery capability.[12]

This would be backed with a 'more business-like' relationship between the Government and the Board: Ministers would have new tools to set robust, lasting goals for the medium- and long-term performance of the network but would also be required to support the Board through meaningful long-term financial commitments. The new Board would remain directly accountable to ministers – their 'shareholders' – for their performance in meeting the 'contract terms'. Ministers would remain able to take appropriate action in the event of sustained or serious failure.[13]

In her preliminary response to the report the then Secretary of State for Transport, Justine Greening, said that she recognised "the potential benefits that greater financial autonomy may bring" and was "pleased to see that Alan is of the view that road users' needs are put at the heart of considerations around specifying future performance requirements for the network".[14]

Action for Roads and subsequent consultation

In June 2013 the Government published a Command Paper on its long term infrastructure investment strategy. In his speech the then Chief Secretary of the Treasury, Danny Alexander, announced the Government's intention to transform the HA into a publicly owned corporation: "… an organisation that will have the long-term funding certainty and flexibility to deliver the best possible road network for the UK's motorists".[15] Further details were published in the *Action for Roads* Command Paper in July 2013. This fleshed-out the proposals to:

- transform how the HA is run, by turning it into a publicly-owned strategic highways company with greater day-to-day independence and more commercial decision-making;
- provide funding certainty and a Roads Investment Strategy to give contractors the certainty to start expanding capacity;
- provide certainty to the public and industry that the Government "will not walk away from its commitments"; and

[11] DfT, *A fresh start for the Strategic Road Network*, November 2011, p6
[12] ibid., pp7-8
[13] ibid., p8
[14] HC Deb 24 November 2011, c34WS
[15] HC Deb 27 June 2013, c470

- ensure accountability with a new 'motorists' champion'.[16]

In September 2013, further to the proposals in *Action for Roads*, the DfT and the HA agreed and published a new Framework Agreement.[17] This was followed, in October 2013, by public consultation on turning the HA into a Government-owned company. The consultation put forward proposals for:

- the creation of an arms-length Government-owned company and the transfer of powers and duties to allow it to discharge functions currently discharged by the HA;
- new legislation to underpin the long term funding settlement and new Road Investment Strategy (RIS) processes;
- power for the Secretary of State to make transfer schemes which would allow assets and liabilities (including land and contractual obligations) to be transferred to a strategic highways company; and
- arrangements for two bodies – a road user watchdog and efficiency monitor – to provide independent scrutiny of the company's performance, advising Government and being a focal point for road users.[18]

The last point was new. The consultation explained that the Government envisioned Passenger Focus and the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) respectively taking on these roles.[19]

On 30 April 2014 the Government published its decision document following the consultation. In a statement to Parliament the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Robert Goodwill, announced the Government's intention to proceed with legislation on the basis set out in the consultation document.[20] The decision document stated that the new strategic highways company (SHC) would be incorporated under the *Companies Act 2006*, and limited by shares where the sole shareholder would be the Secretary of State for Transport. A new governance framework for the SHC would comprise legislation, a licence document, a Framework Agreement, a Road Investment Strategy and Articles of Association, supported by relevant guidance and standards.[21]

The Government published important supplementary information about the HA/SHC changes in June and October 2014. This included: a summary of the Government's case for change; a business case; an outline of the proposed Road Investment Strategy (RIS); draft framework

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[16] DfT, *Action for Roads*, Cm 8679, July 2013, p49
[17] DfT/HA, *Highways Agency framework document: outlining the relationship between the Highways Agency and DfT*, 10 September 2013
[18] DfT, *Consultation on transforming the Highways Agency into a government-owned company*, 29 October 2013
[19] ibid., pp5-6
[20] HC Deb 30 April 2014, cc56-8WS
[21] DfT, *Government Response to consultation on transforming the Highways Agency into a government-owned company*, Cm 8855, 30 April 2014, pp6-7

document, articles of association and licence; and further information on the roles of the monitor and watchdog.[22]

Transport Committee report

In May 2014 the Transport Select Committee published a report on improving the SRN in England (see below). It also looked at the Government's proposals for reforming the HA. The Committee took evidence from a wide range of witnesses, whose views as to the necessity of a new SHC were mixed. The report concluded that the Committee was 'unconvinced' by the Government's plans on the grounds that:

> Its remit will not be extended; it will not have new funding streams; and it will still be subject to changes in Government policy, while incurring ongoing oversight costs. We are not persuaded that increasing salaries will be a value-for-money way of increasing skills in the company. In that context, we note that the agency's current chief executive has worked in both the private and public sectors. The proposed benefits, including the implementation of the five-year funding plans, seem achievable through better management of the existing Highways Agency.[23]

Infrastructure Act 2015

The Queen's Speech on 4 June 2014 included a proposal to "introduce a bill to bolster investment in infrastructure […] and … guarantee long-term investment in the road network".[24] What is now the *Infrastructure Act 2015* was published on 5 June.[25] Part 1 of the Act includes the legislative changes required to turn the HA into HE and provide for 'stable, long term funding' for strategic road investment.

There were questions and concerns raised about why the Government was making this change to the HA. For example, in its May 2014 report the Transport Select Committee said that it was "not convinced by the case for establishing the Highways Agency as a GoCo [government company]":

> Its remit will not be extended; it will not have new funding streams; and it will still be subject to changes in Government policy, while incurring ongoing oversight costs. We are not persuaded that increasing salaries will be a value-for-money way of increasing skills in the company. In that context, we note that the agency's current chief executive has worked in both the private and public sectors. The proposed benefits, including the

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[22] DfT, *Transforming our strategic roads: a summary*, 23 June 2014 [updated 10 December 2014]; *Case for creation of a new public body in place of the Highways Agency*, 6 June 2014; *Setting the Road Investment Strategy - Now and in the future*, 23 June 2014; *Strategic Highways Company: Outline for the Framework Document*, 23 June 2014; *Strategic Highways Company: Approach to the Articles of Association*, 23 June 2014; *Strategic highways company: Draft Licence*, 23 June 2014 [updated 28 October 2014]; and *Transparency for Roads: creating the watchdog and monitor*, 28 October 2014

[23] Transport Committee, *Better roads: Improving England's Strategic Road Network* (fifteenth report of session 2013-14), HC 850, 7 May 2014, para 44

[24] HC Deb 4 June 2014, c4

[25] DfT et al. press notice, "New legislation to boost infrastructure", 5 June 2014

> implementation of the five-year funding plans, seem achievable through better management of the existing Highways Agency.[26]

When the Bill was being debated the Labour Party also questioned why a "top-down reorganisation of the Highways Agency" was required to deliver efficiency savings and secure long term funding. They also questioned whether the change in status might be a precursor to privatisation:

> In the absence of any real evidence to prove that this is needed, is it any surprise that many people are worried that this could become—not now, but in the future—a way of creating an increasingly contracted out, carved out and removed from public control structure?[27]

Government Ministers repeatedly said that the creation of Highways England was not intended to be a 'step towards privatisation'.[28] Labour generally accepted this but tended to ask on that back of that assurance why the changes were needed at all.

HE came into being on 1 April 2015.[29] At the same time, the Government published the relevant supporting documentation, including the Road Investment Strategy (RIS), framework documents, the licence, guidance for the highways monitor (the Office of Rail and Road, or ORR), and a memorandum of understanding.[30]

The ORR is the highways monitor, as specified in section 10 of the 2015 Act. It considers its role to have role have four main aspects:

- to monitor how well HE is delivering against the Performance Specification, Investment Plan and aspects of its licence, to publically report its findings and to advise the Secretary of State;
- if there are problems with delivery, to require improvement and potentially levy a fine (together, 'enforcement');
- to advise the Secretary of State on the development of the next Road Investment Strategy (RIS) including advice on deliverable efficiencies; and
- to advise the Secretary of State on any other relevant issues as requested.[31]

Transport Focus is the road user 'champion', as specified in section 9 of the 2015 Act. It describes its work as: "focusing solely on what users experience and want, being useful to those that make the decisions about transport services, and basing its work on evidence". Its role covers the range of road users including those travelling for personal and business purposes, and non-motorised users such as cyclists and pedestrians. A key piece of work will be to eventually produce the

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[26] Transport Committee, *Better roads: Improving England's Strategic Road Network* (fifteenth report of session 2013–14), HC 850, 7 May 2014, para 44

[27] HC Deb 26 January 2015, c673

[28] see, e.g. then Minister for Transport John Hayes: HC Deb 26 January 2015, c686

[29] via the *Appointment of a Strategic Highways Company Order 2015* (SI 2015/376)

[30] *Strategic highways company: framework*; *Strategic highways company: licence*; *Roads reform watchdog: memorandum of understanding*; *Highways monitor: memorandum of understanding*; and *Roads reform monitor: statutory guidance*, all published 12-20 March 2015 and available from the DfT archived site

[31] ORR, *Monitoring Highways England: First consultation document*, 26 March 2015, p5

satisfaction survey that will replace the survey previously run by the Highways Agency.[32]

More information on the RIS can be found in section 3.3, below.

2.2 Maintenance

Highway authorities have a legal duty to maintain the highway under section 41 of the *Highways Act 1980*, as amended. Further, there are standards of repair that they must follow. The standards for the HE are set out in the *Network Management Manual (NMM)*, particularly Part 3 (routine service) and Part 5 (winter maintenance), and the *Routine and Winter Maintenance Manual*, both updated in July 2009.[33]

Maintenance of the SRN is likely to consume a significant proportion of HE's spend. In the year 2014-15 the Highways Agency, in its last year of operation, spent some £380.5 million on maintenance and similar activities. It resurfaced 1,800 lane miles and achieved annual average savings of £715 million over four years. The maintenance cost per lane mile for 2014-15 was £51,000.[34]

HE has half its maintenance contracts on its new form of Asset Support contract.[35] In 20130-14 the Highways Agency stated that these had stripped more than 20 per cent from the cost of routine maintenance, and in its programme of major projects the HA was on target to deliver over 30 per cent below original cost estimates.[36] In 2013-14 the HA awarded four new Asset Support Contracts, valued at £2.2 billion, covering 31 per cent of the SRN for up to 2022.[37]

The Coalition Government allocated over £1.6 billion for HA maintenance between 2011-12 and 2014-15. The profile of this grant is £416m in 2011/12, £464m in 2012/13, £391m in 2013/14 and £389m in 2014/15.[38] The Government announced in 2013 its intention to spend over £4 billion by 2020-21 on the repair and renewal of the SRN, including resurfacing around 21,000 lane miles – 80 per cent of the SRN.[39]

2.3 Traffic Officers

The Traffic Officer service was launched in October 2004 as a consequence of the HA becoming a network operator, rather than solely a builder and maintainer of roads (see above). In June 2003 the HA and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) published a joint review of their respective roles and responsibilities in terms of managing

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[32] Transport Focus press notice, "Transport Focus – the road ahead", 1 April 2015
[33] DfT, *Routine and Winter Maintenance Manual* (Version 5.10, Amend No. 3), July 2009; and: *Network Management Manual* (Issue 1, Amend No. 8), July 2009
[34] HA, *Annual Report and Accounts 2014-15*, HC 112, 24 June 2015
[35] Asset Support contracts are a new form of maintenance contract, which are gradually replacing the relatively long-standing Managing Agent Contracts
[36] HA, *Annual Report and Accounts 2013-14*, HC 261, 25 June 2014, p9
[37] ibid., p12
[38] HC Deb 21 May 2012, c391W; figures for the spend on the network (maintenance and capital) since 2001 are given in this PQ: HC Deb 19 December 2012, c804W
[39] HMT, *Investing in Britain's Future*, Cm 8669, June 2013, para 2.8

the SRN. The review made the case for transferring a range of traffic management tasks from the police to the HA.[40]

Part I of the *Traffic Management Act 2004* legislated for the use of Traffic Officers on the strategic road network in England and Wales (the latter under the authority of the National Assembly for Wales). Under the Act, a "uniformed on-road traffic officer service" may be established to manage the traffic consequences of random incidents (such as accidents, obstructions, debris and break downs) and manage programmed highway events such as the passage of abnormal loads. The Act enabled some traffic management functions on motorways and other trunk roads carried out by the police to be carried out by Traffic Officers and for Traffic Officers to have powers to stop and direct traffic, and place and operate traffic signs to deal with incidents and keep traffic moving.[41]

In 2013-14 the HA reported that Traffic Officers responded to around 20,000 incidents on average per month.[42]

2.4 Targeted Programme of Improvements (TPI)

Labour's 1998 transport White Paper (see section 3.2, below) established a new role for the HA as a network operator. As such, it was given a new key objective: to carry out the Government's targeted programme of investment in trunk road improvements.[43] This was generally called the Targeted Programme of Improvements (TPI) and lasted from roughly 1998 until 2008 when a new system of prioritising highway schemes was created.

Over a number of years the HA's performance in implementing the TPI came in for some criticism, particularly focused on the significant increases in the costs of the TPI programme. For example, in November 2007 the Public Accounts Committee criticised the HA's "poor track record in estimating the costs of road schemes", citing cost overruns of 40 per cent for the 36 schemes completed to September 2006.[44] The Committee concluded that the Department for Transport had not been rigorous enough in its oversight of the Agency's delivery of TPI.[45] The Transport Committee also criticised the delivery of the programme in 2006. It said that the Agency had "lost budgetary control" of the TPI and that if overruns continued at the current rate, the cost of yet-to-be-

[40] PA Consulting, *Highways Agency/Association of Chief Police Officers: roles and responsibilities report*, 20 June 2003
[41] ACPO's roads policing guidance gives an overview of Traffic Officer powers:: ACPO, *Practice advice on the policing of roads*, 2007, p18; the Transport Committee looked at the scheme in 2006: Transport Committee, *Roads policing and technology* (tenth report of session 2005-06), HC 975, 31 October 2006, paras 24-29
[42] op cit., *Annual Report and Accounts 2013-14*, p11
[43] DETR, *A new deal for transport: better for everyone*, Cm 3950, July 1998, para 3.136
[44] PAC, *Estimating and monitoring the costs of building roads in England* (fifty-eighth report of session 2006-07), HC 426, 8 November 2007, p3
[45] ibid., p3

completed TPI road projects would be 50 per cent higher than originally estimated.[46]

The Government commissioned Mike Nichols, Chairman and Chief Executive of the Nichols Group, to undertake a review of the TPI in 2006; he reported in March 2007 and made three recommendations:

> First, the nature of the programme needs to be properly reflected in its structure and funding. Second, DfT needs to give clearer policy guidance and provide more effective sponsorship and the Highways Agency needs to be more clearly accountable for delivery. Third, the Highways Agency needs to develop its delivery capability.[47]

The Government responded to the Nichols Report by replacing TPI with a new system, grouping schemes in three phases (Options, Development and Construction) with budgets provided only for the progression of a scheme through a phase.[48] Although this marked the end of what was known as TPI, the individual schemes within the programme remained as part of the HA works programme and the concerns about TPI such as increasing costs and errors in calculation continued.[49]

The National Audit Office (NAO) provided a summary of TPI in 2007: to March 2007 the Government had approved £13 billion of expenditure for road schemes in England with construction dates between 1998 and 2021; there were at that time 1,035 schemes in the TPI, of which 36 had been completed by September 2006.[50]

2.5 Smart motorways

Smart motorways (also variously called 'managed motorways', 'active travel management' or ATM or 'hard shoulder running') are a technology-driven approach to tackling the most congested parts of the motorway network by increasing capacity; making journeys more reliable by controlling the flow and speed of traffic; and providing driver information displays on over-head signs.[51]

There was a trial between junctions 3A and 7 of the M42 in 2006-07 which was judged to be enough of a success that the scheme should be extended to other motorways such as parts of the motorway box around Birmingham; sections of the M6 and M40; and other sections of

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[46] Transport Committee, *The work of the Department for Transport's agencies – Driver and vehicle Operator Group and the Highways Agency* (ninth report of session 2005-06), HC 907, 27 July 2006, para 104

[47] DfT, *Review of Highways Agency's major roads programme*, 17 March 2007, piii

[48] DfT, *Roads – delivering choice and reliability*, Cm 7445, June 2008, paras 4.23-4.27

[49] see, e.g.: "Cost of Britain's road-building projects soars by almost £4bn", *The Independent*, 16 August 2008

[50] NAO, *Department for Transport: Estimating and monitoring the costs of building roads in England* (session 2006-07), HC 321, 15 March 2007, paras 1.1-1.2

[51] information on the benefits of the scheme can be found in: HA, *Smart Motorways factsheets*, January 2014

the M42. This began in late 2008 with the intention that all schemes would be in place by spring 2011.[52]

From 2014 all new managed motorway schemes will have hard shoulders converted into full time running lanes. The first to come on stream were part of the M25 in Hertfordshire; between junctions 5 and 8 on the M6; and junction 8 of the M60 near Sale to junction 20 of the M62 near Rochdale.[53] The Coalition Government extended this programme and published plans to do so further after 2015 as part of the Roads Investment Strategy for 2015-21 (see below).

In July 2015 the Conservative Government announced that it had appointed six joint-venture companies to design and build ten smart motorways across England, with a value of approximately £1.55 billion. Three of the projects are slated to begin in autumn 2015: M1 junction 19 to junction 16 in Northamptonshire; M5 junction 4a to junction 6 in Worcestershire; and M6 junction 16 to junction 19 near Stoke-on-Trent.[54]

[52] DfT, *Britain's Transport Infrastructure Motorways and Major Trunk Roads*, January 2009, paras 16-17

[53] DfT press notices, "New generation of motorway opens on M25", 14 April 2014; "Boost for drivers and Midlands' economy as latest smart motorway goes live on M6", 16 April 2014; and "Green light for Greater Manchester smart motorway as work gets underway", 11 July 2014

[54] DfT press notice, "Over £1.5 billion of investment awarded to upgrade motorways in England", 22 July 2015

3. Government policies on road building and enhancements

3.1 Predict and provide

Road building and development has always been a balancing act: different priorities have triumphed at different times given the political environment, economic performance and the prevailing orthodoxy. There are physical and environmental, as well as financial, limits to the amount of extra road space that can be built. Whilst providing extra capacity can provide real and immediate benefits, especially for congestion bottlenecks, it may also free-up suppressed demand and even generate new demand.

From the late 1950s onwards the transport planning orthodoxy was that future traffic was forecast and then the road space built to accommodate it (the so-called 'predict and provide' model). The last major roads programme advocating this view was published in 1989. Predict and provide became largely discredited in the 1990s and the roads programme was progressively cut back. There has been some debate as to whether the Coalition Government returned to predict and provide (see below) under the auspices of 'national infrastructure planning'.

The prevailing orthodoxy, the 1980s

'Predict and provide' is a planning policy where traffic numbers are predicted and the road network is developed to support these predictions. The *Supplementary Dictionary of Transport Studies* explains:

> The policy works on the principle of supply and demand, where congested roads are an indication of too much demand for the available road supply and therefore supply needs to be increased. The alternative of managing demand is seen in the UK as politically hard to implement. The policy has been used in transport planning since the late 1950s when motorway building began. However, it was not until 1979–83, in the Thatcher era, that a greater use of road construction to ease congestion, remove through traffic, and/or improve industrial areas was heralded. A doubling of spending on new road construction and widening of existing roads between 1978/79 and 1982/83 was justified by the contribution that motor transport would make to national economic competitiveness.[55]

In June 1980 the Conservative Government issued its first statement on its trunk road policies for England. It replaced the former annual report *Roads in England*. This set out Government's priorities in the context of 'national economic recovery'. It argued that new road schemes could ring "undoubted economic advantages" (access to markets, distribution, better traffic flow etc.) and "substantial environmental benefits" (diverting heavy lorries form city and town centres, reducing noise etc.). However, national economic recovery also meant a

[55] Helen Roby, *Supplementary Dictionary of Transport Studies*, Oxford University, 2014

reduction in public spending, upon which the roads programme was entirely dependent. Thus the Government indicated its intention to "stabilise trunk road spending at a level the nation should be able to afford" by prioritising roads which: "aid economic recovery and development […] bring environmental benefit [… and preserve] the investment already made". [56]

Over the course of the road reviews between 1980 and 1985, the Government decided on the resources devoted to the system each year in the light of other calls on public spending. Much of the emphasis was on improved management and the increasing adaptability and competitiveness of the construction industry. Schemes added in 1985 dealt with problems of capacity and problems of conflict between the interests of communities and the traffic that passed through them. As a result particular emphasis was based on bypasses and relief roads. [57] By 1987 there was a change of emphasis: a 'substantial' increase in funds had "enabled the programme to give more emphasis to schemes which are intended to meet future needs in a timely fashion rather than just tackling problems when they have already arisen and are obvious to all".[58] Commentators have credited this, the pinnacle of 'predict and provide' in part to the appointment of Paul Channon as Transport Secretary in 1987, in that he was:

> … prepared to act as an advocate of road building *per se* as the primary transport policy 'solution' … fundamentally he believed that roads must be built to accommodate the ever-increasing growth in traffic. In particular, he and key [departmental] officials were deeply concerned by a National Road Traffic Forecast which predicted that total traffic would rise between 83 and 142 per cent by the year 2025, compared with traffic levels in 1988 […] The new *raison d'etre* of trunk roads policy therefore rested less on popular consumerism or as an engine of regional economic growth [as in the 1950s and '60s] but as a reflection of a perceived general economically expansionist future.[59]

In 1988 the National Audit Office (NAO) published a review of the Government's road programme. It found that of the road schemes approved since 1980, 34 (representing 21 per cent of all schemes) had negative economic returns. Sixteen of these were in Scotland. It also stated that while environmental considerations could be important factors in approving new roads, the Government did not believe that they could "attach monetary values to such factors, in the way that they have in other judgemental areas". The NAO also stated that there were 'important benefits' to be gained from taking full account of traffic generation in calculating traffic flows for new urban roads.[60]

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[56] DoT, *Policy for Roads: England 1980*, Cmnd 7908, June 1980, paras 1-9

[57] DoT, *Policy for Roads: England 1981*, Cmnd 8496, February 1982; *Policy for Roads in England :1983*, Cmnd 9059, September 1983; and *National Roads England 1985*, June 1985

[58] DoT, *Policy for Roads in England: 1987*, Cm 125, April 1987, para 2.5

[59] Dudley & Richardson, *Why Does Policy Change? Lessons from British transport policy 1945-99*, 2000, p149

[60] NAO, *Road Planning*, 688, October 1988, p1

It also looked at predicted traffic flows for schemes opened since 1980 and found a wide variation in accuracy: of 137 road schemes in England, 34 saw actual traffic flows more than 20 per cent higher than the original forecast and 39 saw flows 20 per cent below forecasts. NAO stated that the Government faced "significant problems in seeking to make sufficient allowance for, and wherever possible, to quantify, the factors affecting traffic growth" and that despite there being a premium on accurate forecasting and reliable information on the outcome of previously approved and completed projects, the Government had "not evaluated in the light of actual traffic flows the consequences of inaccurate forecasts for individual schemes … or attempted to quantify the costs and benefits actually achieved".[61] It concluded:

> These findings and conclusions must, of course, be seen in the context that … decisions on the construction of roads are political decisions. They do not fall out automatically from the application of analytical techniques. Departmental appraisals of costs and benefits do not – and perhaps cannot – capture all the factors to be weighed in deciding the scale and priority of individual schemes.[62]

The 1989 White Paper, *Roads for Prosperity*, announced a greatly expanded motorway and trunk road programme to relieve congestion on major roads between towns and cities. It maintained that the fundamental objectives were unchanged but it introduced a new emphasis of reducing inter-urban congestion. It gave an even higher priority to meeting the needs of industry and of other road users for a modern strategic road network that also helped to reduce accidents and to improve the environment. Although the Government had looked at other ways to reduce the unacceptable levels of congestion (e.g. increased use of rail for freight, improved traffic management and the imposition of higher taxes on road users), it concluded that the main way to deal with it was: "… by widening existing roads and building new roads in a greatly expanded road programme. The scale of the problem is that it can only be relieved by a step-change in both the size and the composition of the programme".[63] That 'step change' represented essentially a doubling of the total trunk roads programme.

A PQ from February 1990 revealed that since April 1979 the Conservative Government had completed 282 trunk road schemes, totalling 970 miles and including 107 bypasses and relief roads.[64] Planned expenditure in 1994/95 by central government on capital schemes on the English trunk road network was over £2 billion, an increase of more than 50 per cent in real terms on the level in the 1980s. In 1985/86 investment in road infrastructure was almost two-

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[61] ibid., pp3-4
[62] ibid., p5
[63] DoT, *Roads for Prosperity*, Cm 693, May 1989, para 16; a further report was published the following year: *Trunk Roads, England: Into the 1990s*, February 1990
[64] HC Deb 12 February 1990, c103W

thirds of transport investment (excluding purchase of road vehicles) and in 1992193 it was rather more than half.[65]

Out of favour, the early-mid 1990s

Government policy changed in the 1990s. There were several drivers for this, the two most direct ones being forecasts of greatly increased traffic and less public money being available as the economy went into recession. There was also intense opposition to many road schemes with increasing concern about traffic pollution. Other drivers included:

- The appointment of Brian Mawhinney as Transport Secretary in 1994: he was "much more sympathetic to environmental issues than any Transport Secretary since 1979, and had a particular concern about the adverse health effects of vehicle emissions". He was followed by Sir George Young, notable for being a Transport Secretary who was also a member of Friends of the Earth;
- The Department of the Environment acted to a much greater degree as a source of alternative policy ideas than had been the case previously; by the mid-1990s the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, was "quite interventionist and assertive on transport matters";
- Hiving off responsibility for trunk roads to the Highways Agency in 1994 (see above) removed directed responsibility for building roads from the Department of Transport, "consequently the identity of the central policy-making core was no longer bound up with its ability to keep on building roads";
- A mix of direct action groups and protestors and more conventional pressure groups such as Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000 (now Campaign for Better Transport) seized the media agenda and was more coordinated and methodical than had been the case in the past; and
- Suggestions that there was a link between vehicle emissions and some ill health issues (e.g. asthma in children).[66]

One of the key publications driving change at this time was the 1994 report by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP), which suggested halving proposed trunk road programmes and spending the money saved on public transport.[67] It also argued that in effect the nation could not 'build' itself out of congestion:

> One estimate is that, following the addition of 12,500 miles of new lanes to the trunk and local road network by 2000, another 1,700 miles of new lanes would have to be added each year between 2000 and 2025, a total of 42,000 miles of additional lanes. This would be a more rapid rate of road construction than ever achieved up to now in the UK. It is an obviously unrealistic scenario, even if it were acceptable in environmental terms.[68]

Furthermore, there was a 'strong case' for believing that the extension and improvement of the road network "leads to an increase in the total

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[65] RCEP, *Transport and the Environment*, Cm 2674, 26 October 1994, p82
[66] op cit., *Why Does Policy Change? Lessons from British transport policy 1945-99*, pp143-5
[67] op cit., *Transport and the Environment*, p248
[68] ibid., p87

amount of road traffic, as distinct from redistributing a predetermined amount of traffic onto the new and improved roads. This is because it becomes attractive to make more trips and longer trips".[69] RCEP concluded that "the inability of any foreseeable trunk road programme to cope with the forecast growth in traffic destroys the rationale of the 'predict and provide' perspective".[70]

A second influential report, published the same year, was by the independent Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment (SACTRA).[71] The Committee primarily concerned itself with the phenomenon of 'induced traffic', i.e. new road capacity increasing demand, the most infamous example of this at the time was the M25, a 'victim of its own success'. It stated that: "… travellers must, as a matter of logic, be assumed to respond to reductions in travel time brought about by road improvements by travelling more or further" and as a consequence induced traffic "can and does exist", though its size and significance was likely to vary widely in different circumstances. As to its importance, the Committee concluded that "the economic value of a scheme can be overestimated by the omission of even a small amount of induced traffic" and that this was 'of profound importance' to the value for money assessment of the roads programme.[72]

The end of 'Roads to Prosperity', 1994-97

All of these factors fed into a discernible change in Government policy from mid-1994 onwards. In March 1994 the then Secretary of State for Transport, John MacGregor, had announced the results of his review of the road programme.[73] He introduced a revised and prioritised programme to ensure essential schemes were built faster, concentrating on urgently needed by-passes and motorway widening schemes and removing schemes no longer environmentally acceptable or not needed in the foreseeable future.[74]

Following Budget 1994, in which roads expenditure was cut,[75] the new Secretary of State, Brian Mawhinney, announced that he was refocusing the roads programme to concentrate spending on developing the existing network. He said "Our priority now must be to make the most effective use of the existing network - especially motorways - and building to remove congestion and black spots".[76] This formed part of his 'Great Debate' on transport policy, and led to:

- eleven schemes being reviewed for smaller scale improvements;
- eight transferred to the network enhancement programme;
- 104 placed in the longer term programme; and

[69] ibid., p88
[70] ibid., p88
[71] SACTRA was originally established in 1976 by then Transport Secretary Bill Rodgers to review his department's method of appraising trunk road schemes and of traffic forecasting
[72] SACTRA, *Trunk Roads and the Generation of Traffic*, December 1994, executive summary
[73] DoT, *Trunk roads in England: 1994 Review*, March 1994
[74] HC Deb 30 March 1994, cc929-930
[75] *Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995-96*, HC 12, 29 November 1994 p121
[76] DoT press notice, "Mawhinney refocuses roads programme", 19 December 1994

- 77 schemes being withdrawn (including most of the 67 schemes placed in the 'longer term' programme in 1994). [77]

A substantial number of programmes in the 1994 active programme were transferred to a longer term programme. This main programme contained 161 schemes, selected on the same basis as in 1994 (economic benefits, environmental effects and route importance) but with additional emphasis on their significance for regional and local competitiveness and the extent to which they enabled better use to be made of the existing network. It was indicated that many were likely to be put on hold. Following Budget 1996 the then Secretary of State, Sir George Young, withdrew 62 schemes, most of which were in the longer term programme as they had little chance of coming to fruition within a reasonable timescale.[78] He said he would consider developing route strategies over time to identify smaller scale improvements to tackle safety and localised congestion.

The Conservative Government published its last major transport policy document, *Transport: the way forward*, in April 1996.[79] The submissions received to the preceding consultation showed growing public awareness of the impact of traffic growth, but a divergence of views as to how best to promote sustainable development and competitiveness of UK industry. There was strong demand for improved access and more efficient transport but also a clear need to reduce the environmental impacts of transport. Business was concerned about the increased costs of congestion.

The paper stated that since 1979, approximately £24 billion had been spent upgrading motorways and trunk roads. Over 400 schemes had been completed, adding to or upgrading around 1,300 miles of the network. Because of this progress it said that the Government could shift priorities to "make more efficient use of our existing roads. Future spending will focus increasingly on maintaining and managing the capacity of existing roads, and selective improvements through new construction, such as providing much needed bypasses and removing bottlenecks". [80]

Between 1979 and 1997 the Conservatives presided over the construction of around 490 trunk road schemes, totalling around 1,735 miles, equivalent to the construction of about 95 miles per year. The great majority of this additional road space was in the form of dual carriageways, but there were also a small number of motorways.[81]

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[77] DoT, *Managing the trunk road programme,* November 1995; and DoT press notice, "Private finance the centrepiece of revised national road programme", 28 November 1995

[78] DoT press notice, "Government commitment to £6bn trunk roads programme", 26 November 1996

[79] DoT, *Transport: the way forward – the Government's response to the transport debate*, CM 3234, April 1996

[80] ibid., paras 11.16 -11.19

[81] "Roads and Traffic Congestion Policies: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" by William Walton in Docherty & Shaw (eds.), *A New Deal for Transport? The UK's struggle with the sustainable transport agenda*, 2003, p83

3.2 A New Deal for trunk roads

When the Labour Government took office in 1997 the flagship programme of the newly constituted Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), led by John Prescott, was the long sought and persistently elusive 'integrated transport policy'. This would require a rebalancing of priorities from private motor vehicles to public passenger transport (buses, trains and trams) and the use of demand management in the form of road charges for motorists. In time this would produce tensions between the DETR and Number 10: "the government might be 'anti-new roads', but it was fearful of being labelled as 'anti-car'".[82] This was later realised when towards the end of the Labour Government, in its third term, the Conservatives coined the phrase 'war on the motorist' to characterise Labour's transport policy.

Labour's first two terms, 1997-2005

Almost immediately on taking office Labour announced a strategic review of the roads programme to look at what road schemes should be added to or deleted from the trunk roads programme and at their environmental impact.[83] Labour's first transport White Paper, *A new deal for transport*, and its daughter document, *A new deal for trunk roads in England*, were published in July 1998.[84] The White Paper definitively broke with the past, it said: "Simply building more and more roads is not the answer to traffic growth. 'Predict and provide' didn't work".[85]

Both papers called for improved road maintenance and traffic control; investment decisions to be based on integration, safety, economy, environmental impact and accessibility; the identification of a core road network; and the importance of an integrated network.[86] This policy review was accompanied by a more technical review of its project appraisal guidance (the 'new approach to appraisal' (NATA)).

A programme of multi-modal studies (MMS)[87] was launched in March 1999 on the back of the White Paper, to look at how integrated approaches could be used to tackle some of the most severe transport problems on the Strategic Road Network (SRN). There were two different sorts of study: one regionally based and the other specifically 'roads based', primarily directed at specific points on individual roads, and led by the Highways Agency (HA).[88] In the event a later review concluded that the "road scheme study recommendations developed by

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[82] op cit., *Why Does Policy Change? Lessons from British transport policy 1945-99*, p196
[83] HC Deb 19 June 1997, cc281-82W; a two volume consultation document was published in July 1997: DETR, *Roads review – what role for trunk roads in England?: consultation paper*, 28 July 1997
[84] op cit., *A new deal for transport: better for everyone*, and *A new deal for trunk roads in England*
[85] op cit., *A new deal for transport: better for everyone*, para 1.4
[86] ibid., pp1-13; and: HC Deb 31 July 1998, cc653-676
[87] road, rail, bus, light rail/guided bus, walking and cycling
[88] HC Deb 23 March 1999, cc158-60W; a list of the 21 schemes commissioned by the Department is available on its archived website

the MMS are generally not detailed enough to be implemented without much more work required from the Highways Agency".[89]

In July 2000 the Government published its 10 year plan for transport. This stated that there would be a 'strong presumption' against road schemes that would significantly affect environmentally sensitive sites, or important species, habitats or landscapes. All road schemes would include high standards of environmental mitigation to ensure that, so far as reasonably possible, noise and the impact on biodiversity, the landscape and heritage were minimised. The entire SRN would be managed in line with biodiversity action plans by 2005, and with landscape action plans by 2010.[90] In terms of funding, the 10 year plan contained provision for capital expenditure on the SRN of approximately £16.2 billion to 2010, comprised of £13.6 billion from public sources and £2.6 billion from the private sector.[91]

In July 2003 the then Secretary of State for Transport, Alistair Darling, announced £3 billion of new money for the SRN to "deliver real improvements for people and businesses across the country" on routes such as the M25 and M1, but that "unless there is an overriding public interest, there should be a strong presumption against building roads through areas of outstanding natural beauty or other sensitive sites". He also said that, looking ahead 20 to 30 years, the country would "not be able to build our way out of all the pressures we will face".[92] On the same day he published a discussion paper examining the options for road management in the context of an anticipated 20 to 25 per cent growth in traffic by 2010. In particular, it focused on congestion reduction, traffic management, reducing delays caused by utility companies, and the potential for future road pricing.[93]

This was followed, in July 2004, by a further transport White Paper. The paper stated that the Government had delivered 20 road major schemes since 2002.[94] However, it also cautioned that an expanding network and increased traffic projections were unsustainable and it was here that Labour confirmed its intention to pursue serious demand management in the form of nationwide charging on the road network.

Between May 1997 and June 2005 the Labour Government constructed or improved (e.g. by dualling) 193 miles of trunk road and 125 miles of motorway in England.[95]

Eddington and beyond, 2005-10

In Budget 2005 the Chancellor announced that Sir Rod Eddington, then the outgoing Chief Executive of British Airways, had been asked to work with the Department for Transport and the Treasury to advise on the

[89] AEA Technology for the DfT, *Evaluation of the multi-modal study process: final report*, July 2004, para 11.18
[90] DETR, *Transport 2010: the 10 year plan*, July 2000, para 6.29
[91] ibid., paras 6.31-6.33
[92] HC Deb 9 July 2003, cc1175-1196
[93] DfT, *Managing Our Roads*, July 2003, pp4-7
[94] DfT, *The future of transport: a network for 2030*, Cm 6234, July 2004, para 3.9
[95] HC Deb 27 June 2005, cc1268-70W

long-term impact of transport decisions on the UK's productivity, stability and growth.[96] It was intended that Sir Rod's study would sit within the context of the Labour Government's objectives for sustainable development, and seek to expand the understanding of one key element of this balance, namely the links between transport and economic growth. The study was intended to seek to understand the precise nature and significance of these links and to consider how this could be translated into transport policy in the UK.

The *Eddington Transport Study* was published on 1 December 2006, to accompany the 2006 Pre-Budget Report.[97] The report estimated that by 2025, without action, there would be a 31 per cent increase in road traffic, 30 per cent increase in congestion on the roads and a four per cent decrease in carbon dioxide emissions.[98] The second and third of the report's three key policy recommendations related specifically to the road network: firstly that over the following 20 years, the strategic economic priorities for transport policy should include key inter-urban corridors that showed signs of increasing congestion and unreliability; and secondly that the Government should adopt a 'sophisticated' policy mix to meet both economic and environmental goals (e.g. road pricing).[99]

The Labour Government's official response to both the Eddington and Stern reviews[100] was published as a single document in October 2007. On major road developments, the document discussed then then planned widening of the M25 and problems with road improvements delivery on the SRN. Specifically, it commented that major road projects "typically take up to ten years to deliver, from the point at which a decision is taken to identify options" and that it was "not easy to fix an accurate estimate of scheme costs, far in advance of appointing a contractor and starting construction". It went on to explain how the HA would implement the recommendations of the Nichols review (see section 2.1, above) and stated that the HA would "take account of Eddington's analysis of the key transport links which contribute most to national productivity and competitiveness".[101]

There were hints in early 2008 that the roads programme would face cuts. For example, in an appearance before the Transport Select Committee in January 2008 the then Secretary of State for Transport, Ruth Kelly, indicated that there would be 'tough choices' about whether to proceed with various road building schemes in the future.[102] In July 2008 the government published a command paper setting out its priorities for the roads programme; in her statement to the House

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[96] HM Treasury, *Budget 2005*, HC 372, para 3.105
[97] for more information on the Eddington Study, see HC Library briefing paper SN4208
[98] DfT/HM Treasury, *The Eddington Transport Study: The Case for Action*, December 2006, para 1.71
[99] ibid, paras 1.81 & 1.180
[100] *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, October 2006
[101] DfT, *Towards a sustainable transport system*, Cm 7226, 30 October 2007, paras 3.23-3.25
[102] Transport Committee, *Department for Transport annual report 2007* (seventh report of session 2007-08), HC 313, 13 June 2008, Qq136-137

introducing the paper, Ms Kelly announced £6 billion in funding for improvements to the SRN to 2014.[103]

This was followed, in January 2009 by a further paper on motorways and trunk roads – one of the three documents forming part of the Government's broader strategy on 'Britain's transport infrastructure'.[104] On scheme prioritisation it stated that the Government had:

> … reflected Sir Rod Eddington's recommendations, and the role that roads play in supporting wider governmental aims, as well as practical delivery considerations [such as introducing] managed motorways across this core motorway network, linking and serving our major cities. The first tranche of investment will make a start on all these routes, including some of the most congested sections. We have also given high priority to schemes which facilitate housing growth […]
>
> The schemes under consideration are at different stages of development and this has informed when they could feasibly be delivered. Experience has shown that it is difficult to predict with precision how quickly individual schemes will progress from design and construction to completion. The Highways Agency is also investigating the scope for further cost efficiencies in scheme delivery as technology and procurement practices develop. The proposed programme therefore includes a degree of over-programming so that if one scheme is delayed, or if scheme costs are lower than currently assumed, other schemes can be advanced.[105]

Over the course of its full 13 years in office, Labour added 1,122 miles of lane length to the SRN.[106] The Labour manifesto for the 2010 General Election stated that "tackling road congestion is a key Labour priority" and promised to "extend hard-shoulder running on motorways, alongside targeted motorway widening including on the M25".[107]

3.3 Infrastructure planning: predict and provide redux? 2010-

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government that took power in May 2010 made no mention of road building in their Coalition Agreement.[108] In his appearance before the Transport Select Committee in July 2010 the then Secretary of State for Transport, Philip Hammond, indicated that the preferred approach of the Coalition Government would be to where possible improve the operation of the SRN, rather

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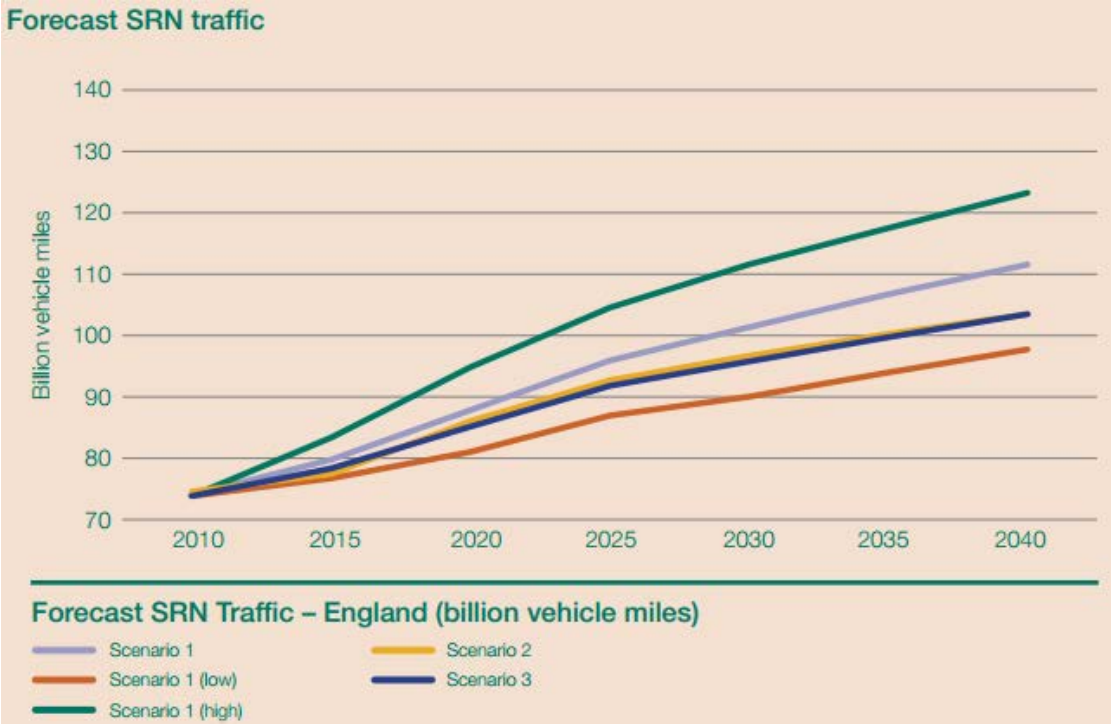
[103] HC Deb 16 July 2008, c33WS; and op cit., Roads – delivering choice and reliability
[104] the other two being on high speed rail and the future expansion of Heathrow Airport
[105] op cit., *Britain's Transport Infrastructure Motorways and Major Trunk Roads*, paras 23-31
[106] HC Deb 4 February 2010, c459W; and HC DEP 2010-0332, February 2010
[107] Labour Party, *A Future fair for All*, April 2010, p18
[108] HMG, *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*, May 2010; there was nothing on this in the Conservative manifesto; but the Liberal Democrats pledged to make investments in the rail network "paid for by cutting the major roads budget" (p78); for earlier, contrasting views from two of the Conservatives' policy groups, see: *Blueprint for a Green Economy*, September 2007, p316 and *Freeing Britain to Compete: equipping the UK for globalisation*, August 2007, pp25-26

than build new roads. He also stated that the pace at which the Government "can address this agenda will be constrained by the availability of capital for investment over the next Spending Review period".[109]

In its 2014-15 annual report it stated summarised the Pinch Point Programme. The programme began in spring 2013, and comprised three tranches totalling 123 schemes, with a budget of £318 million. Of the 123 schemes, 100 were completed by the end of March 2015, with the remainder due for completion by September 2015.[110]

Peak car?

DfT traffic demand forecasts project an increase of 27 to 57 per cent in driving on the SRN by 2040, exacerbating existing problems:[111]



However, the Government's model is not without its critics and some argue that we have self-evidently reached 'peak car', making the Government's forecasts optimistic at best. 'Peak car' is a term generally used when referring to the idea that car miles per person per year has reached a historic peak and that in the future, it will remain static or decline.

This chart shows the fluctuating growth in traffic levels over time:[112]

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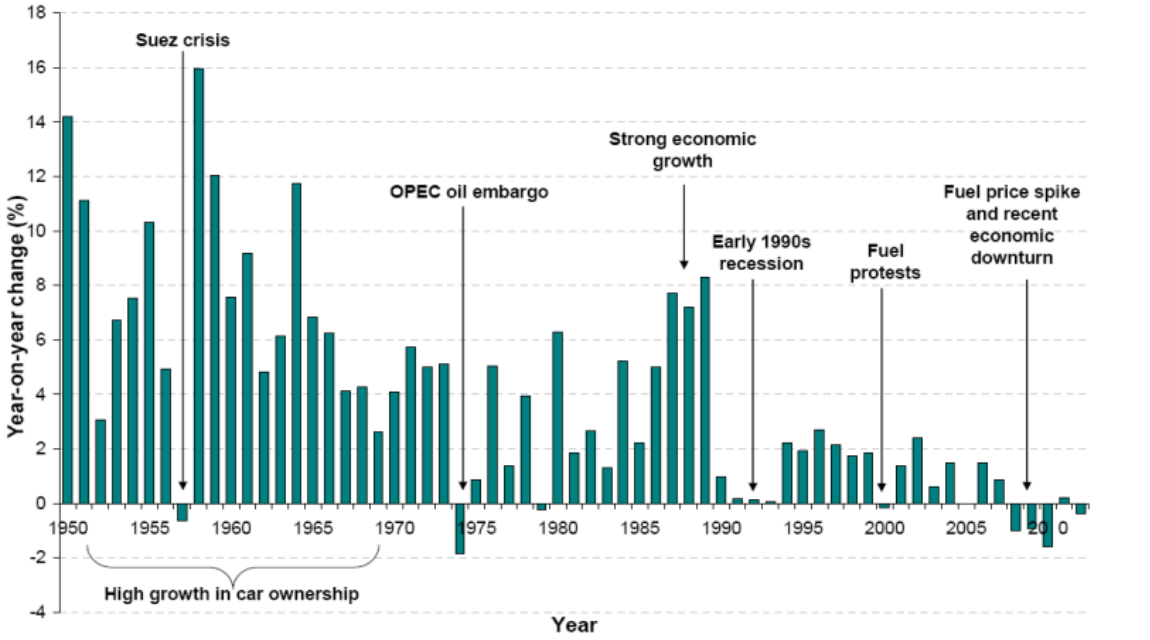
[109] Transport Committee, *Uncorrected evidence: The Secretary of State's priorities for transport*, HC 359, 26 July 2010, Qq79&81

[110] op cit., *Annual Report and Accounts 2014-15*, p16; more information on the Pinch Point programme can be found on the HE website [accessed 10 August 2015]

[111] DfT, *Road Investment Strategy: Strategic Vision*, December 2014, p33; a year earlier the *Road Transport Forecasts 2013*, July 2013 had predicted growth of between 24 and 72 per cent over the same period (p5)

[112] POST, *Peak car use in Britain*, November 2013, p2; based on figures from: DfT, *Traffic volume - miles (TRA01)*, June 2013 [subsequently updated but not taken in the original chart]

Figure 1: Year-on-year change in total motor vehicle road traffic volume in Great Britain, from 1949 to 2011



In their November 2013 literature review for the Transport Select Committee, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) summarised the 'peak car' debate as follows:

> National statistics indicate that average car miles per person in Britain has levelled off since the 1990s, even though there was steady economic growth from the mid-1990s to 2007.
>
> The Department for Transport (DfT) forecasts that car miles per person will begin to grow again as the economy recovers, based on estimates of three key drivers: GDP, fuel cost and population growth.
>
> Peak car proponents argue that in the future car use per person will remain static or decline, and that social, cultural and spatial factors will be increasingly important in determining the overall amount and modes of travel in the future.
>
> Evidence indicates that behind this overall levelling off of car miles per person, there are contrasting behavioural trends between different groups of transport users. It suggests that lifestyle and attitudinal factors interact in a complex way with each other and with broader economic factors and government policies around transport and land use planning.
>
> However, it is unclear to what extent recent changes in travel behaviour are the result of choices or of constraints, and data limitations make it highly difficult to evaluative the relative importance of alternate explanations and their impact on future travel behaviours.[113]

Specifically on the SRN, POST stated:

> It is difficult to determine the change in traffic over time specifically on the SRN because since 1999 the management of parts of the SRN has been transferred from the HA to relevant Local Authorities (22.7%). Taking this into account, best estimates are that traffic volumes on the SRN grew by 7% from 2002 to

[113] ibid., p1

> 2012, compared to a 3% fall experienced by Local Authority managed roads in the same time period; however these statistics are experimental and should be treated with caution. This suggests that there are different rates of growth on different classes of road, and that the SRN may be under more pressure than its local counterparts due to a concentration of traffic on these road classes, and a relative increase in car miles per person amongst populations using the SRN.[114]

In a December 2014 article David Metz, visiting professor at the Centre for Transport Studies, University College London, explained the deficiencies of the DfT's traffic forecasts, based on the National Transport Model (NTM), as follows:

> How credible are these traffic forecasts? They are outputs of the Department's National Transport Model, which is getting long in the tooth and needs to be rebuilt in a form that can be made publicly available – now standard practice for Government macro models. There are questions about whether the model adequately recognises both road capacity constraints in cities and travel time constraints – average travel time has not changed for 40 years. So I regard as questionable a scenario projection that, by 2040, around 25 per cent of the entire SRN, and 35 per cent of the motorway network, will experience severe congestion at peak times and suffer poor conditions at other times of the day.
>
> Congestion is self-limiting on account of the travel time constraint. As congestion increases, speeds reduce, and some road users change their plans. Congestion on the SRN largely occurs near population centres where locally generated traffic impedes long-distance traffic. If carriageway is added, at considerable expense, the locals take advantage of initially higher speeds to increase trip length, most importantly when they change jobs or move house. These longer trips restore congestion to what it was, and long-distance users are no better off. This is the basis for the maxim 'You can't build your way out of congestion' – something that past transport ministers would say when no major road construction was planned, and which remains true.[115]

In its May 2014 report on the road network the Transport Select Committee reiterated these and other deficiencies in the NTM identified by academics and campaigners and recommended that the Government move away from the NTM to develop a "transparent system of road planning as part of a wider national transport strategy".[116]

Commentators have seized on traffic projections in the DfT's recent policy statements and subsequent funding commitments to grow the road network (see below) as proof that the Government is has returned to 'predict and provide'. For example, the Transport Planning Society has questioned the lack of attention to demand management and land use planning as a means of tackling congestion and the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation has criticised the 'writing off' of the potential for modal shift from road to rail for passengers. The

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[114] ibid., p2
[115] "Why are we planning to spend so much on new roads when we live in an information age?", *Local Transport Today*, 16 December 2014 [LTT 662]
[116] op cit., *Better roads: Improving England's Strategic Road Network*, para 27

Campaign for Better Transport has consistently questioned the credibility of the NTM and the policy decisions based upon it; it set out the 'false propositions' as follows:

> That forecasts of a dramatic increase in road travel up to 2040 are reliable; that these forecasts should be provided for; that a sustainable transport policy and 'national need' can be defined by dramatically increased levels of road travel; that increased road travel automatically increases economic activity; and that building amounts of new road capacity will result in long-term reductions in congestion.[117]

National Policy Statement

In December 2013 the Coalition Government published for consultation a draft of its National Policy Statement (NPS) on National Networks (roads and rail).[118] This set out the proposed policy against which the Secretary of State for Transport would make decisions on applications for nationally significant infrastructure projects on the national road and rail networks; the need for development of those networks and Government policies for ensuring necessary development, within the context of its long term goals for sustainable transport. The consultation closed in February 2014 and the final draft NPS was published in December 2014.[119] It was laid before Parliament on the same date.

The Transport Committee examined the draft NPS and published a report in May 2014. This recommended a number of relatively minor changes to the document.[120] In its response to the Committee, also published in December 2014 the Government responded to the Committee's main recommendations. It rejected criticisms of its traffic forecasts (see above) and calls to: include an estimate of the impact on UK carbon emissions of meeting projected demand for growth in road traffic by building more road infrastructure; name locations where development was particularly desirable, e.g. port and airport access; and include a reference to HS2 connecting with local networks. However, it agreed to make the following amendments to the NPS:

- specification of the key drivers of need for transport development;
- expectation that scheme promoters should consider the use of new technology in design of infrastructure;
- presumption against road widening or new roads in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and recognition of the special protection and 'very special circumstances' that would need to exist to justify any development on the Green Belt (although this does not change established Green Belt policy);

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[117] "Rethink 'predict and provide' roads policy, profession tells DfT", *Local Transport Today*, 10 March 2014 [LTT 642]

[118] the *Planning Act 2008* introduced a new planning regime for nationally significant infrastructure projects; the NPS is part of this, for full details see: HC Library briefing paper SN6881

[119] DfT, *Draft national policy statement for the national road and rail networks: summary and consultation*, December 2013; and: *National networks national policy statement consultation: government response*, Cm 8977, December 2014

[120] Transport Committee, *National Policy Statement on National Networks* (sixteenth report of session 2013-14), HC 1135, 7 May 2014

- clarification that 'proportionate option consideration of alternatives' (as required under EU law) should take place as part of the appraisal process before the scheme is submitted;
- requirement for applicants to have regard to the objectives of relevant local plans and to consider reasonable opportunities to support other transport modes in developing infrastructure; and
- proportionate options assessment of alternative transport modes to take place as part of the appraisal process.[121]

Finally, it made a specific comment on whether the Government's policy constituted a 'return to predict and provide', rejecting the idea comprehensively:

> Investment in roads is not an outdated approach of predicting and providing for all future traffic growth, irrespective of cost and environmental and social impacts. The NPS very clearly rules this out. It is about sensible and sustainable development, where there is a strong justification, based on a rigorous consideration of all the costs and all the benefits.[122]

National Infrastructure Plan & Road Investment Strategy

Allegations of a 'return to predict and provide' rest partly on the contentious traffic forecasts discussed above and partly on the huge expansion of road building proposed under the National Infrastructure Plan and, latterly, the Road Investment Strategy.

Following the publication of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in October 2010, the Coalition Government announced how it would progress highway transport schemes in England over the course of that Parliament. These are what used to be called the 'Targeted Programme of Improvements' (see above). The then Secretary of State said that the Government would provide funding to complete eight ongoing strategic road schemes; start a further 14 between 2010 and 2015; examine a further 18 schemes for delivery after 2015 and cancel seven remaining schemes "due to fiscal constraints".[123]

At the same time the Government published its first National Infrastructure Plan (NIP). This set out in broad terms the principles that would underpin Government spending decisions on major projects in the areas of energy infrastructure; transport infrastructure; digital communications; flood management, water and waste; and intellectual capital.[124] The 2011 and 2012 updates of the NIP set out progress against the major road schemes announced in previous years and announced new schemes to be added to the NIP.[125]

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[121] DfT, *Government Response to the Transport Select Committee Report on the Draft National Networks National Policy Statement*, Cm 8978, December 2014
[122] ibid., para 3.4
[123] HC Deb 26 October 2010, cc177-78; and: DfT, *Investment in Highways Transport Schemes*, October 2010, paras 15-35 [HC DEP 2010-1881]
[124] HMT, *National Infrastructure Plan 2010*, October 2010
[125] HMT, *National Infrastructure Plan 2011*, November 2011; and *National Infrastructure Plan: update 2012*, December 2012

The 2013 update of the NIP set out in more detail progress to date on the main SRN schemes: accelerated road construction pilots; Highways Agency new capacity; smart motorways; the A14 and the Lower Thames Crossing. Overall the NIP stated that existing commitments would lead to the construction of at least 52 major road projects by 2020-21; add over 750 lane miles of capacity to the busiest motorways and trunk roads; and resurface as much as 80 per cent of the SRN by 2020.[126] The 2014 NIP largely trailed the Roads Investment Strategy, published at about the same time (see below); but it also summarised NIP road achievements to date: 14 major roads projects completed and 14 more in construction; over 200 smaller road improvements; and the opening of new smart motorway lanes on the M1, M6 and M25.[127]

The move to Highways England from 1 April 2015 (see section 2.1, above) involved a multi-year funding settlement, called a Roads Investment Strategy (RIS). On 1 December 2014 the Coalition Government published an overview of the first RIS. The appendices to the document set out the specific schemes to be delivered in every English region as part of the 2015-21 RIS, summarised in the table below.[128] It included a headline £15 billion investment figure for this RIS period.[129] The funding breakdown is given in the 'key facts and figures' companion document. It gave a figure of £15.2 billion in capital committed over this period, which included £9.4 billion spending on major improvements (£6 billion of pre-December 2014 commitments, and a further £3.4 billion committed in the RIS).[130]

Critics have pointed to "badly flawed" feasibility studies being used "to justify damaging road building schemes right across the country":

> Some proposals are likely to be flashpoints, including the Stonehenge tunnel, A27 Arundel bypass in the South Downs, a number of road building plans in the Peak District and the A417 in the Cotswolds.[131]

They have also reiterated the concerns made in relation to the traffic forecasts, the NPS and NIP projects, that "new roads create new traffic" and that: "Worse, the Government has given notice that its fixation with new tarmac will continue indefinitely. The RIS announced there will be new studies into dualing the A66 and A69, an expressway between Oxford and Cambridge, and the beginnings of a new London orbital outside the M25 and even a £6bn road tunnel under the Peak District".[132]

In its manifesto for the 2015 General Election the Conservative Party stated that it would:

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[126] HMT, *National Infrastructure Plan 2013*, December 2013, p35
[127] HMT, *National Infrastructure Plan 2014*, December 2014, p32
[128] DfT, *Road Investment Strategy: Overview*, 1 December 2014, pp28-41
[129] ibid., p5
[130] DfT, *Road Investment Strategy – Key Facts and Figures*, 1 December 2014; further details in: DfT, *Road investment strategy: investment plan*, 1 December 2014; other RIS documents available on the Gov.uk website
[131] "More roads mean more traffic – an inconvenient truth the government has ignored", *New Civil Engineer*, 4 December 2014
[132] ibid.

> … invest £15 billion in roads. This will include over £6 billion in the northern road network, with the dualling and widening of the A1 north of Newcastle and the first new trans-Pennine road capacity in over 40 years. We will take action to tackle some of the most notorious and longstanding problems on our road network, including improvements to the A303, A47 and A27. We will add 1,300 extra lane miles to our roads, improve over 60 problem junctions, and continue to provide enough funding to fix around 18 million potholes nationwide between 2015 and 2021.[133]

The July 2015 Summer Budget stated that the Conservative Government would produce a second RIS for the period 2020-25 before the end of the 2015 Parliament, based on the new Roads Fund also announced in the Budget.[134]

[133] Conservative Party, *Strong Leadership, A Clear Economic Plan, A Brighter More Secure Future: The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015*, 14 April 2015, p15

[134] HMT, *Summer Budget 2015*, HC 264, 8 July 2015, p97, para 2.188; for more information on the Roads Fund, see pp12-14 of HC Library briefing paper SN1482

RIS regional profiles: 2015/16-2020/21					
Region	*Schemes under construction*	*Committed schemes – previously announced*	*Committed schemes – new*	*Schemes developed for next Road Period*	*Strategic studies*
North East and Yorkshire	A1 Coal House to Metro Centre A1 Leeming to Barton M1 Junctions 39-42 M1 Junctions 32-35A	A19 Coast Road A19 Testos A63 Castle Street A160/A180 Immingham	A1 North of Ellingham A1 Morpeth to Ellingham dualling A1 Scotswood to North Brunton A1 Birtley to Coal House widening A19 Down Hill Lane junction improvement A19 Norton to Wynyard A1 & A19 Technology enhancements M1 Junction 45 Improvement M621 Junctions 1-7 improvements M62/M606 Chain Bar M62 Junctions 20-25 A628 Climbing Lanes A61 Dualling	Hopgrove Junction M1/M62 Lofthouse Interchange A1 Redhouse to Darrington M1 Junctions 35A-39 A1(M) Doncaster Bypass	Northern Trans-Pennine Trans-Pennine Tunnel
North West England[135]	M60 Junction 8 to M62 Junction 20: Smart Motorway A556 Knutsford to Bowdon	M6 Junctions 21A-26 M62 Junctions 10-12 M60 Junctions 24-27 & J1-4 M56 Junctions 6-8 M6 Junctions 16-19	A585 Windy Harbour – Skippool A5036 Princess Way – Access to Port of Liverpool Mottram Moor link road A57(T) to A57 Link Road M6 Junction 22 upgrade M53 Junctions 5-11 M56 new Junction 11A M6 Junction 19 Improvements	M60 Simister Island Interchange	Northern Trans-Pennine Manchester North-West Quadrant Trans-Pennine Tunnel

[135] further scheme 'funded from other sources' - M55 Junction 2

Region	*Schemes under construction*	*Committed schemes – previously announced*	*Committed schemes – new*	*Schemes developed for next Road Period*	*Strategic studies*
Midlands[136]	M1 Junctions 28-31 A453 Widening M6 Junctions 10a-13 A14 Kettering bypass widening M1 Junction 19 improvement A45-A46 Tollbar End M1 Junctions 13-19	A38 Derby Junctions M1 Junctions 24-25 A50 Uttoxeter M6 Junctions 13-15 M6 Junctions 2-4 M5 Junctions 4A-6	A500 Etruria widening M1 Junctions 23A-24 M6 Junction 10 improvement A5 Dodwells to Longshoot widening M42 Junction 6 A46 Coventry junction upgrades M40/M42 interchange Smart Motorways A45/A6 Chowns Mill junction improvement M5 Junctions 5, 6 & 7 junction upgrades A43 Abthorpe Junction	A46 Newark Northern Bypass M1 Junctions 19-23A M5/M42 Birmingham Box Phase 4 A45 Stanwick to Thrapston	
East of England137			A47 North Tuddenham to Easton A47 Blofield to North Burlingham dualling A47 Acle Straight A47/A12 junction enhancements A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction A47 Guyhirn Junction A47 Wansford to Sutton A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet M11 Junctions 8 to 14 – technology upgrade A12 Chelmsford to A120 widening A12 whole-route technology upgrade A1(M) Junctions 6-8 Smart Motorway M11 Junction 7 junction upgrade	A12 Colchester Bypass widening A12 M25 to Chelmsford	Oxford to Cambridge Expressway A1 East of England

136 further schemes 'committed subject to other contributions' - A52 Nottingham junctions; M54 to M6/M6 Toll link road; A14 Junction 10a; and A5 Towcester Relief Road; and one 'funded from other sources' - M1 Junctions 24-24A improvement

137 further schemes 'committed subject to other contributions' - A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon and A5-M1 Link Road

Region	*Schemes under construction*	*Committed schemes – previously announced*	*Committed schemes – new*	*Schemes developed for next Road Period*	*Strategic studies*
East of England[138]			A47 North Tuddenham to Easton A47 Blofield to North Burlingham dualling A47 Acle Straight A47/A12 junction enhancements A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction A47 Guyhirn Junction A47 Wansford to Sutton A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet M11 Junctions 8 to 14 – technology upgrade A12 Chelmsford to A120 widening A12 whole-route technology upgrade A1(M) Junctions 6-8 Smart Motorway M11 Junction 7 junction upgrade	A12 Colchester Bypass widening A12 M25 to Chelmsford	Oxford to Cambridge Expressway A1 East of England

[138] further schemes 'committed subject to other contributions' - A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon and A5-M1 Link Road

Region	*Schemes under construction*	*Committed schemes – previously announced*	*Committed schemes – new*	*Schemes developed for next Road Period*	*Strategic studies*
London and South East England[139]	M3 Junctions 2-4A	M4 Junctions 3-12 M25 Junction 30 M20 Junctions 3-5 M23 Junctions 8-10 A21 Tonbridge to Pembury M3 Junctions 9-14 M27 Junctions 4-11	A34 Oxford Junctions A34 Technology enhancements M25 Junction 25 improvement M25 Junction 28 improvement M4 Heathrow slip road M2 Junction 5 improvements M25 Junctions 10-16 M25 Junction 10/A3 Wisley interchange M3 Junction 9 improvement M3 Junction 10-11 improved sliproads M3 Junctions 12-14 improved sliproads M27 Southampton Junctions M271/A35 Redbridge roundabout upgrade A27 Arundel Bypass A27 Worthing and Lancing improvements A31 Ringwood	Lower Thames Crossing A3 Guildford	Oxford to Cambridge Expressway M25 South-West Quadrant
South West England[140]			M49 Avonmouth Junction M5 Bridgwater Junctions A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down A303 Sparkford – Ilchester dualling A358 Taunton to Southfields	A417 'Missing link' at Air Balloon	

[139] further schemes 'committed subject to other contributions' - A2 Bean & Ebbsfleet junctions; M20 Junction 10a; A27 Chichester Improvement; and 'funded from other sources' - A20 Access to Dover and M27 Junction 10

[140] further schemes 'committed subject to other contributions - A30 Temple to Higher Carblake and A30 Chiverton to Carland Cross

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