

Proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network

1. Introduction

As part of the Transport Investment Strategy, the government announced that it would take forward proposals to create the Major Road Network (MRN).

This middle-tier of economically and strategically important local authority 'A' roads will sit between the nationally-managed Strategic Road Network (SRN) and the rest of the Local Road Network. These roads will benefit from targeted funding available through a share of the National Roads Fund, with the aim to improve productivity and connectivity in our towns and cities.

In creating this network, the government has 5 central policy objectives. These are:

- **Reduce congestion** – alleviating local and regional congestion, reducing traffic jams and bottlenecks.
- **Support economic growth and rebalancing** – support the delivery of the industrial strategy, contributing to a positive economic impact that is felt across the regions.
- **Support housing delivery** – unlocking land for new housing developments.
- **Support all road users** – recognising the needs of all users, including cyclists, pedestrians and disabled people.
- **Support the SRN** – complementing and supporting the existing SRN by creating a more resilient road network in England.

This consultation seeks views on the government's proposals for how the MRN will achieve these policy objectives across 3 themes. These are:

- **defining the network**
- **investment planning**
- **eligibility and investment assessment criteria**

The proposals in this consultation outline how the MRN will:

- form a consistent, coherent network alongside the SRN that brings about the opportunity to better co-ordinate roads investment
- provide funding certainty to roads in the network, through use of the National Roads Fund, and raise standards and performance across the new network
- provide clear roles for local and regional partners, who will support the government to deliver and develop MRN schemes

Confidentiality

We thank all respondents for taking the time to read the consultation document and to respond to the consultation questions. Your views on the programme's core objectives and principles, as well as the major themes set out in the consultation, will contribute to the formulation of MRN policy.

2. Respondent details

Your contact details. We will only contact you if we need to clarify any of the answers you give us.

Your name

Your email

In what capacity are you responding?

- ☐ Central government, executive agency or non-departmental public body
- ☒ Local authority or combined authority
- ☐ Sub-national transport body, ADEPT or other regional partnership (public sector)
- ☐ Industry or business (private sector)
- ☐ MP / Councillor
- ☐ Member of the public
- ☐ Other (please specify):

In which region are you based?

- ☐ East Midlands
- ☐ London
- ☐ East of England
- ☐ North East
- ☐ North West
- ☒ South East
- ☐ South West
- ☐ West Midlands
- ☐ Yorkshire and the Humber

3. MRN core principles

Questions in this section relate to pages 20 to 21 of the consultation document, 'MRN Core Principles'.

In order to deliver our objectives for the MRN, we believe there are a number of fundamental principles that must be at the heart of our plans for a MRN and its programme of investment.

These are:

- **increased certainty of funding**
- **a consistent network**
- **a coordinated investment programme**
- **a focus on enhancement and major renewals**
- **clear local, regional and national roles**
- **strengthening links with the Strategic Road Network**

Q1. Do you agree with the proposed core principles for the MRN outlined in the consultation document?

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Don't know

4. MRN core principles

If you answered no, which core principle(s) do you disagree with? Provide an explanation why.

We agree with the six proposed core principles however there is a need to recognise the need to support all categories of road users. There appears to be a focus towards enhancement and major renewals and no reference to the benefits improvements to public transport or to non-motorised can bring to the MRN. In order to better promote non-motorised users it is also important the note the issues relating to road safety and as this is a key element of better journeys for all users. These should be acknowledged within the core principles.

5. Defining the network

Questions in this section relate to pages 22 to 27 of the consultation document, 'Defining the Network'.

The extent of the network must strike a balance between capturing the most economically important regional roads and ensuring that its size is appropriate, enabling investments that can drive an improvement to the level of funding available.

Any definition must make the best use of local and regional knowledge to ensure that the most economically important roads are captured. To strike this balance appropriately, we are proposing the use of both quantitative and qualitative criteria to define the network. This approach ensures:

- the network is coherent, i.e. more than just a set of fragmented sections of road
- the network has a sound, objective analytical basis, yet also has the flexibility to factor in local knowledge and requirements

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the quantitative criteria outlined in the consultation document and their proposed application?

- ☐ Strongly agree
☒ Agree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

6. Defining the network - quantitative criteria

If you disagree or strongly disagree, what should be the quantitative criteria?

N/A

7. Defining the network - qualitative criteria

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the qualitative criteria outlined in the consultation document and their application?

- ☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neither agree not disagree
☒ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

8. Defining the network - qualitative criteria

If you disagree or strongly disagree, what should be the qualitative criteria?

Wokingham Borough Council agree with the majority of the proposals however with regard to Access to/Resilience for the SRN we believe that there needs to be a recognition that some local roads that run parallel to the SRN do play an important role in providing additional capacity along the corridor particularly in sections where the SRN is at or over capacity during peak period. In addition, it is important that local roads that feed the SRN are also recognised as being an integral part of the SRN/MRN. The use of the flow and qualitative criteria in these instances would be appropriate, however it would not be appropriate to exclude these roads because they are considered access routes.

Resilience for the SRN must be an important factor to consider. Whilst it is recognised that many of these routes serve as agreed tactical diversion routes for the SRN during incidents or road works on the SRN, many are also used far more often when the SRN is overloaded. To ensure that the additional capacity for the corridor is maintained it will be necessary to ensure that funding is available when needed and should therefore be considered for inclusion in the MRN.

9. Defining the network

Q4. Have both the quantitative and qualitative criteria proposed in the consultation document identified all sections of road you feel should be included in the MRN?

- ☐ Yes
☒ No
☐ Don't know

If no, explain how the criteria are failing to identify a section of road you feel should be included.

The indicative map of the MRN includes a number of key routes within the Borough of Wokingham that we agree should be in the MRN, namely the A329(M)/A3290, the A33 and parts of the A4. However we fail to understand why the A4 in its entirety is not included. In addition, the B3270 should be included. Both routes provide key routes through Berkshire, support the SRN and have traffic flows in excess of the quantitative criterion, link major employment and urban areas with significant populations. We also believe the A327 and A329 should also be considered.

Q5. Have the quantitative or qualitative criteria proposed in the consultation document identified sections of road you feel should not be included in the MRN?

- ☐ Yes
☒ No
☐ Don't know

If they have, explain why these roads should not be included in the MRN.

N/A

10. Defining the network – refreshing the MRN

It will be important for the MRN to remain relevant and reflect the latest data and changes to economic centres and road use. However, this must be balanced against the need to provide a stable platform on which the MRN investment programme can be delivered.

We propose to review the MRN every 5 years to coincide with the existing Road Investment Strategy (RIS) timetable. This will involve updating and reviewing the data that are used and engagement with all bodies involved in the delivery of the MRN programme.

Q6. Do you agree with the proposal for how the MRN should be reviewed in future years?

- ☒ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If you answered no, how should the MRN be reviewed in future years?

N/A

11. Investment planning

Questions in this section relate to pages 28 to 31 of the consultation document, 'Investment Planning'.

The creation of the MRN should support long-term strategic consideration of investment needs in order to make best use of the targeted funding that will be made available from the National Roads Fund and deliver the best possible result for the user. The important national and regional role played by roads included in the MRN means that individual local authorities cannot plan investments in isolation, nor can decisions be completely centralised at either a regional or national level.

As set out in the core principles section of the consultation document we propose that, alongside the local role of highways authorities, there needs to be a strong regional focus for investment planning within a consistent national network. The consultation document sets out roles for:

- **local bodies (such as local authorities and local highways authorities)**
- **regional bodies (such as sub-national transport bodies)**
- **national bodies (such as the department)**

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the roles outlined in the consultation document for:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree not disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Local bodies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional bodies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
National bodies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have selected Disagree or Disagree Strongly for any of the proposed roles, what should the role involve? Specify which role you're referring to, ie local, regional or national.

N/A

12. Additional roles and responsibilities

Q8. What additional responsibilities, if any, should be included? State at which level these roles should be allocated.

No further comments

Q9. Do you agree with our proposals to agree regional groupings to support the investment planning of the MRN in areas where no sub-national transport bodies (STBs) exist?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

If you answered no, explain how the MRN should be managed in regions where no STBs exist.

Wokingham Borough is in the Transport for South East (TfSE) region and also the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP area.

13. Investment planning – regional evidence base

We propose that STBs or regional groups would be responsible for developing a regional evidence base which would be the basis for the development of the MRN investment programme. Where STBs exist we expect that the regional evidence base would be developed from the existing statutory transport strategies for which STBs are responsible.

The regional evidence base would be evidence-based and should not be limited to performing a mechanical sifting exercise. As a minimum, the department would expect them to comprise the following:

- an assessment of the overall condition of the existing network and its performance.
- the identification of network-wide issues and priority corridors.
- analysis of potential region-wide solutions and the development of specific interventions to tackle the issues identified over at least a 5 year period, although we expect and encourage STBs or regions to look beyond this in their strategic planning.
- an assessment of the potential sequencing of the schemes identified.

Q10. Are there any other factors, or evidence, that should be included within the scope of the regional evidence bases?

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Don't know

If you answered yes, describe the additional factors or evidence you feel should be within the scope of the regional evidence bases.

N/A

14. Investment planning – the role of Highways England

A core principle of the MRN programme is to bring more coordinated planning to these important roads. Given Highways England's experience in road investment planning, and the need to ensure a seamless transition between the SRN and MRN, we propose that Highways England, the body responsible for running the SRN, should also have a role in the MRN Programme. This role could include:

- **programme support** - Highways England could have a role in the governance of the MRN investment programme advising the department on the development of the MRN pipeline and its interactions with the SRN, and providing wider support as needed.
- **analytical support** - Highways England could support the department in analysing the regional evidence bases in order to prepare advice to ministers on the MRN investment programme.
- **cost estimate support** - Highways England could support the department in assessing scheme cost estimates.
- **delivery support** - Highways England could support, if required, LAs in the delivery of agreed MRN schemes. This could include advising LAs on design and development as well as supporting access to the supply chain to enable LAs to take advantage of economies of scale that may be available.

Q11. Do you agree with the role that has been outlined in the consultation document for Highways England?

- ☒ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If you answered no, what should be the role of Highways England?

N/A

15. Eligibility criteria

Questions in this section relate to pages 32 to 35 of the consultation document, 'Eligibility and investment assessment criteria'.

The department does not intend to replace existing funding streams such as formula funding for Highway Maintenance or Integrated Transport Block funding which may be directed to any LA roads including the MRN network. For that reason, we propose that funding to improve and enhance the MRN should be targeted towards significant interventions that will transform important stretches of the network.

We propose that only proposals for contributions of £20 million or over will be considered for MRN funding. As we want this fund to benefit all areas of the country and produce an improvement for users across the network we would expect that most funding requests would not exceed £50 million, where there is a strong case we would be willing to consider scheme proposals requiring higher contributions, up to a maximum of £100 million.

To get the best value for money, regions and local authority promoters should work to minimise scheme costs through scheme optimisation and the securing of third party contributions, alongside local contributions. We are proposing the following schemes would be eligible for MRN funding:

- bypasses
- missing road links
- widening of existing MRN roads
- major structural renewals
- major junction improvements
- variable message signs
- traffic management and the use of smart technology and data
- packages of improvements

Q12. Do you agree with the cost thresholds outlined in the consultation document?

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Don't know

If you answered no, what should be the cost thresholds?

There should be some recognition that not all interventions that provide significant improvements to the network will meet the minimum threshold of £20m. Relatively minor schemes should not be excluded from the process just because they are 'cheap'. There should be a consideration for the strength of the business case and the schemes value for money.

The previous threshold for DfT funding for major project was £5m and this could be considered the lower threshold although schemes in the range of £2m-£5m should be considered on the merits of the business

Q13. Do you agree with the eligibility criteria outlined in the consultation document?

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Don't know

If you answered no, what should the eligibility criteria be?

There appears to be a presumption against Public transport enhancements. The criteria should be extended to include Public Transport and non-motorised user interventions. The provision for these modes have the potential to significantly reduce congestion along routes, one of the objectives for the MRN. The provision of MRT along these routes in addition to bus priority schemes at junctions would provide significant improvements for access to bus and coach services and facilitate modal shift from private cars.

16. Investment assessment criteria

To support the development of regional evidence bases and a national investment programme we are proposing that a clear set of criteria be developed. These support the government's overarching objectives for the MRN programme whilst providing local and regional bodies the flexibility to develop proposals that support the delivery of local and regional objectives.

We propose that these criteria should be as follows:

Objective	Criteria
Reduce Congestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alleviate Congestion ○ Environmental Impacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve air quality and biodiversity ○ Reduce noise and risk of flooding ○ Protect water quality, landscape and cultural heritage sites
Support Economic Growth & Rebalancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Industrial Strategy: Supports regional strategic goals to boost economic growth ○ Economic Impact: Improve ability to access new or existing employment sites ○ Trade & Gateways Impact: Improve international connectivity, e.g. access to ports & airports
Support Housing Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support the creation of new housing developments by improving access to future development sites and boosting suitable land capacity
Supporting All Road Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deliver benefits for non-motorised users, including cyclists, pedestrians and disabled people ○ Safety Benefits: Reduce the risk of deaths/serious injuries for all users of the MRN
Support the SRN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve end to end journey times across both networks. ○ Improve journey time reliability ○ Improve SRN resilience

Q14. Do you agree with the investment assessment criteria outlined in the consultation document?

- ☐ Yes
☒ No
☐ Don't know

If you answered no, what should the investment assessment criteria be?

Support for All Road Users should include Public Transport Interventions.

Q15. In addition to the eligibility and assessment criteria described what, if any, additional criteria should be included in the proposal? Please be as detailed as possible.

There must be acknowledgement of the benefits public transport interventions can provide to the MRN objectives.

17. Other considerations

Q16. Is there anything further you would like added to the MRN proposal?

It is important that all roads designated as part of the MRN should meet a certain minimum standard to ensure consistency across the network. This standard will need to reflect the different needs between urban & rural roads and should include expected minimum standards for non-motorised users.

Any revenue spending implications as a result of these capital investments must be considered and addressed accordingly. We expect that the day to day maintenance of the MRN within our area will remain with the local authority, however any increased cost for maintenance requirements as a result of the MRN standards being applied or as a result of increased asset management & maintenance must not adversely affect councils existing budget and maintenance funding will need to be adjusted accordingly.

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