
Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Road Investment Strategy
Author: Owen Wilson, Head of Major Roads
Sponsor: Darren Oldham, Rail and Road Director
Meeting Date: Thursday 22 June 2023

1. Purpose of the report:

1.1 To discuss and agree on Transport for the North's plans for responding to the Department for Transport (DfT) consultation on the:

- The Strategic Road Network Initial Report (SRN IR), the key statutory consultation in the RIS planning process.

And National Highways' consultation on:

- Connecting the Country – a long-term strategic plan to 2050
- Route Strategy Overview Reports (6 reports covering areas of the North)
- Environmental Sustainability Strategy (ESS).

Consultation deadlines are 13 July 2023 for the SRN IR and 11 August 2023 for Connecting the Country, Route Strategy Overview Reports and ESS.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 The Board is asked to:

- Provide comments on proposed key messages in Transport for the North's response
- Agree the proposed timetable and governance for finalising Transport for the North's response.

3. Main issues:

3.1 Transport for the North has worked collaboratively with National Highways (NH) to provide evidence on the North's requirements for investment in our strategic roads. Transport for the North provided input into the early drafts of the Route Strategy reports and provided feedback to DfT on the Strategic Objectives for the next road investment period.

3.2 The SRN IR provides advice to Government on the needs of the Strategic Road Network, it does not set out confirmed policy decisions or commitments for delivery. Government will use the report to inform decisions on the outcomes, priorities, and funding available for the road period, which will be in the Road Investment Strategy, scheduled for publication in 2024.

3.3 Consultation on the SRN IR includes consideration of the RIS3 Strategic Objectives:

- Improving safety for all
- Improved environmental outcomes
- Network performance
- Growing the economy
- Managing and planning the SNR for the future
- A technology enabled network.

And five core themes:

- Improving safety for all

- Making the most of our network
 - Evolving our customer and community services
 - Driving decarbonisation and environmental sustainability
 - Taking a targeted approach to enhancing our network.
- 3.4 The Connecting the Country plan sets the long-term vision up to 2050 for the Strategic Road Network (SRN) and is described as bringing together existing strategies, including National Highway's Route Strategies, Net Zero Highways, Digital Roads and Customer Service Strategy.
- 3.5 National Highways has published 20 Route Strategy Reports, six covering routes within the North. Each report sets out route objectives developed following input from stakeholder workshops. The Route Strategy Reports provide context on the route, detail constraints on the route and opportunities for improved connections with local roads and rail links. The Route Strategy Reports directly relevant to the North cover a similar geography to the Strategic Development Corridors Study areas developed by Transport for the North for the first Strategic Transport Plan, and to the UKNET Strategic Transport Network identified in the Union Connectivity Report. The Route Strategies most relevant to the North are:
- North Pennines
 - South Pennines (West)
 - South Pennines (East)
 - London to Scotland (East)
 - London to Scotland (West)
 - London to Leeds (East).
- 3.6 DfT has set up an online portal for consultation responses, asking for feedback and ranking of the level of importance on specific topics, this includes feedback on:
- The six strategic objectives
 - Routes that should be considered for trunking (adding to the SRN) or de-trunking (removing from the SRN)
 - The nine focus areas split across three groups identified in the report
 - The approach to the core themes identified – safety, making the most of the existing network, evolving National Highways customer and community services, decarbonisation and environmental sustainability and taking a targeted approach to enhancing the network
 - The core performance measures
 - The approach to digital technology
 - Evidence available to support the RIS3 equality impact assessment
 - The analytical approach.
- 3.7 DfT have asked for feedback on roads for potential 'trunking / de-trunking', a decision that has a direct impact on Local Highway Authority's operation of their networks. Other than those routes already identified, Transport for the North is not in a position to make a recommendation on where roads should be added or removed from the designated strategic road network, though remain open to discussion with partners on potential candidates.
- 3.8 The RIS3 publications are lengthy documents that require substantial time for review and comment. A draft response to the SRN Initial Report is attached as appendix 1.

Proposed Governance Timetable

- 3.9 DfT and National Highways will give a presentation to this meeting on the SRN IR and associated strategies and reports.

- 3.10 The proposed timetable for completion of Transport for the North response to the SRN IR:
- a) Transport for the North share draft response to SRN IR with Officers 14 June 2023 for feedback by 26 June 2023
 - b) Transport for the North to share final draft of SRN IR response with Officers 30 June 2023
 - c) Executive Board to review and provide final comments by 6 July 2023
 - d) Submit SRN IR to response DfT 13 July 2023.

- 3.11 The proposed timetable for completion of Transport for the North response to Connecting the Country, Route Strategy Reports and Environmental Sustainability Strategy:
- a) Transport for the North to share draft response with Officers 6 July 2023 with 2-week deadline for feedback by 20 July 2023
 - b) Transport for the North to share final draft with Officers 27 July 2023 for final comments by 7 August 2023
 - c) Submit response to National Highways 11 August 2023.

4. Corporate considerations

Financial implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications from this report.

Resource implications

- 4.2 The Major Roads and Strategy Team will continue to engage with DfT and National Highways on the RIS Programme and undertake work to further develop Transport for the North's evidence base underpinning recommendations for the RIS.

Legal implications

- 4.3 There are no apparent significant legal implications resulting from this report.

Risk management and key issues

- 4.4 There are no risk implications as a result of this report.

Environmental implications

- 4.5 This report does not constitute, of itself, a plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents of projects listed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive and therefore does not stimulate the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or EIA. All proposed infrastructure developments will be subject to screening for the need for EIA by the relevant development authority as part of the design development and consenting process.

- 4.6 Transport for the North's response seeks alignment of the strategies and plans subject to the consultation with Transport for the North's Decarbonisation Strategy and wider approach to sustainable highways.

Equality and diversity

- 4.7 There are no specific implications.

Consultations

- 4.8 Executive Board is being consulted on proposed recommendations for preparing Transport for the North's response to the SRN Initial Report.

5. Background papers

- 5.1 SRN Initial Report (SRN IR).
- 5.2 Connecting the Country – a long-term strategic plan to 2050.
- 5.3 Route Strategy Overview Reports (6 reports covering areas of the North).
- 5.4 Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used

- a) SRN – Strategic Road Network
- b) RIS – Road Investment Strategy
- c) SRN IR - Strategic Road Network Initial Report
- d) NRTP – National Road Traffic Projections
- e) DfT – Department for Transport
- f) CCC - Committee for Climate Change
- g) EIA - Environmental Impact Assessment
- h) SEA - Strategic Environmental Assessment

Appendix 1

SRN Initial Report Draft Response

Strategic Road Network Initial Report

We welcome publication of the SRN Initial Report, Connecting the Country, Route Strategy Reports and the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

There is much to commend in National Highways work on developing plans for the next Road Investment Strategy, and as the statutory sub-national transport body representing the North we will continue to work with DfT and National Highways on ensuring the North's provides clear recommendations on the future RIS programme.

1. We strongly support a commitment to collaborate more closely with STBs, local authorities and metropolitan mayors. "To work proactively with mayors, local authorities, STBs and other transport network providers, in particular engaging earlier in the local and regional planning development process. And to integrate the SRN network, working more proactively and closely to shape the solutions to known issues, enable sustainable development and provide greater travel choice for our customers." (Pages 82, 111, 114).
2. We strongly support the proposed focus on meeting a long-term vision and to taking a strategic 'decide and provide' approach to future planning, and to be "increasingly proactive in shaping the future for our customers and network." (Page 71).

This is a very welcome recognition of the need for a vision led approach and it is vital that National Highways work with Transport for the North and our partners in ensuring that the RIS and the operation of the SRN contributes to achieving our vision and ambitions for the North as described in the statutory transport plan (STP2).

Utilising our Future Scenarios and Place based analysis, Transport for the North is well placed to work with National Highways on an outcome focused approach to appraising scheme options, supporting the shared vision set out in the STP.

Stronger recognition of the importance of the strategic case and DfT support for a more holistic place-based approach will be critical to achieving 'decide and provide' vision led delivery, avoiding a narrow focus on an economic business cases generated through use of National Road Traffic Projections (NRTP).

Given that Transport for the North was established as a statutory body by Government to advise it on investment priorities for the North it is essential that NH's work reflects the priorities set out in the updated Strategic Transport Plan (STP2).

3. We have fundamental concerns with the mismatch between the National Road Traffic Projections (2022) referenced on page 72 of the report, which are substantially higher under most scenarios than that assumed within the CCC's Balanced Pathway. A programme based upon the NRTP would be inconsistent with the requirements of the CCC's Sixth Carbon Budget. This is also important because the NRTP Core scenario, is a prediction of what will occur, meaning the RIS programme will embed a 'predict and provide' method as opposed to the 'decide and provide' that the report infers is the adopted approach to strategic planning.
4. Although the report acknowledges the need to offer increased choices to enable customers to travel differently, it should go further in stating that alternative options to new road capacity should be thoroughly considered as part of early options appraisal work. This should include appraisal of policies and investment which would reduce the need for travel by car, LGV or HGV, and go beyond a basic assessment of a 'do minimum or business as usual' appraisal of the potential for planned investment in public transport and/or active travel to reduce vehicle trips on the SRN.

Alternative modes assessments should be produced in the context of the advice in relation to local and regional outcome priorities (including social and environmental), as prepared by statutory Sub-national Transport Bodies and Local Transport Authorities (LTAs).

This is a fundamental issue, as the SRN will only perform effectively if other parts of the network also perform well. Rail, local public transport and active travel need to offer better travel choices to truly deliver a whole network solution.

5. We support the six key objectives, though would like to see greater recognition of the urgent need to decarbonise road transport as a headline objective for the RIS programme. The DfT consultation response form asks for feedback on the level of importance of each objective. We believe that to achieve Transport for the North's Vision and ambitions the SRN needs to perform well in meeting all six objectives, however our Strategic Transport Plan sets out our strategic ambitions for are:

- Transforming economic performance
- Rapid decarbonisation of our transport network
- Enhancing social inclusion and health.

Therefore, we view Growing the Economy (if done in a sustainable way), Improved Environmental Outcomes (most importantly focusing on decarbonisation), and Safety (for all road users and should include measures to reduce severance, particularly in areas impacted by Transport Related Social Exclusion) as critically important to meeting our Strategic Ambitions. The remaining SRN IR objectives, Network performance, Technology enabled network and Managing and planning the SRN are important enablers.

6. We strongly support the reference to the Committee for Climate Change's (CCC's) Sixth Carbon Budget and the application of PAS 20801 in this respect and the acknowledgement that investments should first and foremost make the most of the network by:

- Keeping it in good order
- Offering increased choices to enable customers to travel differently
- And then acknowledging that it is only after this that you would consider providing more capacity through technology or physical space.

This approach goes further than that suggested in the draft National Network National Policy Statement (Page 11). However as highlighted in point 3 we have significant concerns with the reliance on NRTP to inform scheme appraisal.

7. We support the proposal to "drive decarbonisation and environment sustainability." With a commitment to a 40-50% reduction in carbon from construction and maintenance over RIS3 and to enabling the increasing use of low emission and electric vehicles.

The adoption of PAS 2080 for managing infrastructure carbon using the hierarchy of: "building nothing; building less; building cleverly; and building efficiently" should be commended. It is also important that the report has recognised the reality that there may be net increase in costs to drive the deeper carbon reductions needed, but that National Highways can act as a test bed and driver of that change (Page 11). National Highways have a significant role in driving positive change in the design and construction sector and we welcome the recognition that they have an important role in working with the industry supply chain and in sharing good practice.

8. The report references that potential for National Highways to take a more proactive role in providing the infrastructure to support Electric Vehicle Charging (Page 122).

¹ PAS2080 is an international standard for managing carbon in building and infrastructure.

National Highways has a vital role in future-proof charging capacity at motorway and major A-road service areas. Transport for the North has given National Highways access to our Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure evidence base and is working to influence and support plans for rapid charging infrastructure on the SRN and wider network (Page 16).

9. We support a clear focus on improving safety for all SRN users, with an emphasis on “reducing the risk on 1-star and 2-star roads, rated by the International Road Assessment Programme (iRAP), lifting the rating to 3-star or better.” And commitment to work on influencing driver behaviour, to improve facilities for disabled drivers and invest in infrastructure improving safety for walkers, cyclists and equestrians. (Page 12).

National Highways has an existing target of reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on the SRN to 50% of the 2005-2009 baseline by the end of 2025. We will seek to influence consideration of a future target, taking account of the draft STP headline objective of reducing the number of people killed and seriously injured in traffic incidents to zero by 2050.

10. We support the proposal for a national programme for freight facilities (Page 118, 137) and for National Highways to do more to support the development and delivery of improved freight facilities.

The need for more secure high quality HGV parking is identified within Transport for the North’s Freight Strategy and was a key issue emerging from the Route Strategy partner workshops.

11. We support the overall approach reflecting the need to give more consideration to the wider benefits of road investment (e.g., active travel infrastructure, opportunities to improve community impacts, integration with other travel modes). This aligns with the key messages in Transport for the North’s second Strategic Transport Plan.
12. We support recognition of the need for greater investment in maintaining the existing network and adaptation to impacts of climate change. Increased resilience of the network is a key priority in mitigating the potential for community and economic impacts of severe weather, with significant investment required to maintain and upgrade existing assets. We support reference to use of natural flood management schemes (Pages 30, 44).
13. We support recognition that the SRN does not exist in isolation from other parts of the transport network and an ambition is to improve customers’ end to end journeys, not just the part of their journey which takes place on the SRN. Similarly, we support proposals to take a broader approach to supporting end to end journeys, including improved facilities for freight and non-motorised users. Supporting growth and development alongside the SRN and addressing legacy impacts on the network, including air quality and noise (Page 15). And to do this by working collaboratively with Transport for the North, as the statutory Sub-national transport body representing the North, and with local authorities and other transport providers, aligning investment to local transport plans as far as possible (Page 14).
14. We support the five core themes: “Improving safety for all, Making the most of the network, Evolving customer and community services, Taking a targeted approach to enhancing the network, Driving decarbonisation and environmental sustainability.” Though also propose the need for an emphasis on improving outcomes for community wellbeing, for example reducing severance impacts of the SRN, particularly where affected communities are most impacted by Transport Related Social Exclusion, poor air quality and traffic noise. We have shared Transport for the North’s work on Transport Related Social Exclusion with National Highways and using that evidence will help highlight the potential for greater use of bus and active travel will seek to

influence planning for improvements for those modes, benefiting local communities.

15. The report recognises that improved digital connectivity will be central to customer experience in the future, with increasing functionality of digital servicers changing customer expectations around real-time data availability, informed decision-making and personalisation of information.

We support greater use of digital technologies and more sharing of data across public authorities and transport operators to better enable management of the SRN and local road networks, aid provision of integrated multi-modal travel information, and to support performance monitoring of customer journeys (Page 112).

16. We commend the report's stated aim that National Highways will work with partners to accelerate environmental delivery, for example utilising the extensive National Highways 'soft estate' to deliver 'nature – based' solutions (Page 84).

17. We support continued investment in new road capacity where congestion issues cannot be fixed by other approaches, with a commitment to investigating all non-physical methods of providing solutions to local problems before building, and to only progress those schemes that have wide and varied support from stakeholders and users.

18. The SRN IR includes a section on 'Taking a targeted approach to enhancing our network', (Page 131) which sets out plans to:

- Assess all enhancement options against PAS2080
- To continue to develop and deliver RIS1 and RIS2 committed schemes
- Take forward stock take actions relating to improving safety on Smart Motorways
- Place an increasing focus on smaller £2M-£25M schemes to support levelling up and spread opportunity, tackle current known issues, and enable growth and align with local travel plans
- Improve safety on single carriageways and other A roads, in particular through improvements along a whole route.

Transport for the North broadly supports this approach and has ongoing engagement with the National Highways on the development of a programme of smaller local schemes, including sharing of information developed through the Strategic Development Corridor Studies. However, in our consultation response we also propose that we state that as evidenced in our SDC studies and RIS recommendations discussed at the Board on 23 March 2023 there are sections of the SRN in the North where larger scale interventions maybe required to improve transport connectivity, reliability, and resilience of the journeys.

19. The report makes specific reference (Page 133) to progressing existing commitments including the A66 Northern Trans-Pennine and Lower Thames Crossing. We strongly support the full dualling of the A66 and will need to carefully consider our feedback on the implications of Government's decision to defer funding for delivery of other major enhancements until RIS4 at the earliest, for example options identified through the Strategic Studies (e.g., Manchester North West Quadrant) and the RIS3 pipeline schemes. The issues that led to identification of the pipeline schemes still exist, and it is important that further work progresses on considering a full range of multi-modal options for improving network performance.

20. We welcome plans to develop Development Control Order (DCO) action plans, improving pre-engagement prior to DCO submission, using lessons learnt from previous DCO processes and developing a risk matrix for DCO pipeline schemes (Page 143). And support the need for a greater emphasis needed on managing risk of delay and cost increases impacting on the delivery of future RIS programmes. DfT have recently closed the 'Acceleration Unit', it would be helpful to seek further clarity on how 'Project Speed' lessons learned will be applied to future RIS schemes.

As the statutory sub-national transport body Transport for the North we have provided

input to the Strategic Case for RIS schemes and are engaging with National Highways on development of business cases. Early engagement and throughout the development of schemes will help strengthen scheme business cases, prior to entering the DCO submission.

Transport for the North's substantial evidence base and robust analytical appraisal tools mean we are well placed to work collaboratively with delivery partners on inputting to options assessment and the strategic and economic appraisal of scheme options.

The SRN IR includes a short section on measuring performance and the need to review and update the RIS Performance Framework (Page 153). We propose that our response supports the proposal to update the Framework, in particularly including the need for a carbon metric, an updated biodiversity net gain metric and a performance indicator that supports Active Travel. And that our consultation response will set out the need for Transport for the North's statutory advice to be considered in agreeing the updated Performance Framework.

21. The DfT consultation response asks "What, if any, evidence and other insights can you supply towards the development of our RIS3 equality impact assessment?".

Transport for the North can supply evidence and data on Transport Related Social Exclusion and insights from our Citizens Panel surveys.

22. The DfT consultation response asks for comments on the strategic outline of the approach on analysis for RIS3. With a link to a separate document, available [here](#).

In summary DfT's proposed approach is to build upon the analysis developed for RIS2, and to:

- Improve assessment of the benefits of operations, maintenance and looking at the impact of the interventions on DfT's RIS3 strategic objectives and whether they are cost effective in achieving these objectives through Objective Impact Analysis. In doing so, putting a greater focus on outcomes across strategic themes, for example economic, safety, carbon, and people-centred analysis
- Update traffic demand forecasts to ensure analysis is based on the latest assumptions
- Continue to update and improve assessment of the environmental impacts including air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and biodiversity in our analysis
- Ensure we better understand the interactions between potential RIS3 schemes
- Improve the approach to understanding and communicating the uncertainty around analysis.

The proposed approach to analysis of value for money is that it 'will be carried out in line with HMT's Green Book and DfT's transport analysis guidance (TAG). This analysis looks at the impact on all individuals in the UK (positive and negative) and assess whether the benefits outweigh the costs. It is this analysis that will underpin the economic case in the business case.' Transport for the North is concerned that insufficient weight is given to the wider social and environmental needs that might give rise to the need for investment.

The online document gives very little detail on the further development of the analytical tools, or of how changes to travel due to the impact of the pandemic have been assessed. We would also particularly welcome sight of how the wider economy model is structured, and the opportunity to review the assumptions to ensure that it appropriately reflects ambition in the North.

In our response to DfT we propose to request further detail on the analytical approach, and will offer to work with DfT and National Highways on strengthening the approach to appraisal of proposed interventions in the RIS Programme.

