

Solent to Midlands Route Strategy

March 2017



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Route strategies

The division of routes for the programme of route strategies on the Strategic Road Network

- London to Scotland East
- London Orbital and M23 to Gatwick
- London to Scotland West
- London to Wales
- Felixstowe to Midlands
- Solent to Midlands
- M25 to Solent (A3 and M3)
- Kent Corridor to M25 (M2 and M20)
- South Coast Central
- Birmingham to Exeter
- South West Peninsula
- London to Leeds (East)
- East of England
- South Pennines
- North Pennines
- Midlands to Wales and Gloucestershire
- North and East Midlands
- South Midlands



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1. Introduction

The modernisation of England's motorways and major A roads, also known as the strategic road network (SRN), is making a vital contribution to economic wellbeing and growth. This Route Strategy – one of 18 such reports – provides a statement on the current performance of, and perceived pressures on, the Solent to Midlands route to inform the planning of future investment.

The SRN supports national and local economic prosperity by:

- linking together major cities
- connecting with extensive local road networks
- providing links to major ports, airports, and rail terminals
- enabling good access to regions and cross-border routes between the nations of the United Kingdom

The establishment of Highways England through the Infrastructure Act 2015 has changed fundamentally the way we plan investment in the network. Funding is now determined every 5 years, in the [Road Investment Strategy \(RIS\)](#), which is set by Government. We are currently delivering on the commitments that were set out in the first RIS covering 2015 to 2020, which are already making a difference for road users across the network.

At the same time, we are working closely with the other 3 bodies with statutory responsibility for the RIS – Department for Transport, Office of Rail and Road and Transport Focus – on preparing for the next RIS (RIS2) for the period after 2020.





Purpose of Route Strategies

Route Strategies provide a high level view of the current performance of the SRN as well as issues perceived by our stakeholders that affect the network. They are one of the key components of research required for developing the RIS. This suite of Route Strategies builds upon the analysis underpinning the first set of Route Strategies undertaken between 2013 to 2015, which together provided the first comprehensive assessment of the entire network. This time the Route Strategies aim to:

- bring together information from key partners, motorists, local communities, construction partners, environmental groups and across the business
- achieve a better understanding of the condition and performance of our roads, and local and regional aspirations
- shape our investment priorities to improve the service for road users and support a growing economy
- help inform the next RIS¹

Strategic themes

The Government’s vision for transforming the SRN is described in the [Road Investment Strategy post 2020: Planning Ahead](#) document available on www.gov.uk. This vision builds on the 5 broad aims published in the [Road Investment Strategy for 2015-2020](#): economy; network capability; integration; safety; and the environment. It also builds on Highways England’s 5 strategic outcomes (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Using the evidence from this and the other 17 Route Strategies, we will develop proposals that can help bring the Government’s vision for roads to life.

RIS1 Strategic Vision as reiterated in “RIS Post 2020: Planning ahead”



Figure 1.1 - RIS1 strategic vision

Highways England Strategic Business Plan’s key outcomes

- Supporting economic growth** through a modernised and reliable network that reduces delays, creates jobs and helps business compete and opens up new areas for development
- More free-flowing network** where routine delays are more infrequent, and where journeys are safer and more reliable
- Safe and serviceable network** where no one should be harmed when travelling or working on the network
- Improved environment** where the impact of our activities is further reduced, ensuring a long-term and sustainable benefit to the environment
- More accessible and integrated network** that gives people the freedom to choose their mode of transport and enable safe movement across and alongside the network

Figure 1.2 - Highways England strategic outcomes

¹See Chapter 6 for more information on the next RIS



Stakeholder engagement

Building on the engagement we started in the first round of Route Strategies, we have continued to work closely with a wide range of stakeholders to enhance our understanding of the strategic road network, and identify where users and other stakeholders feel investment is needed.

We used a number of methods to collate information. For example, we launched an online tool for customers and stakeholders over the summer of 2016 to inform us of the issues and challenges on our roads that affected them. As well as information collated from a range of people within Highways England, more than 300 different stakeholder organisations provided important feedback on the network during the evidence collection period. There were also more than 370 individual members of the public who contributed information. In total, around 2,700 individual points were raised by external stakeholders.

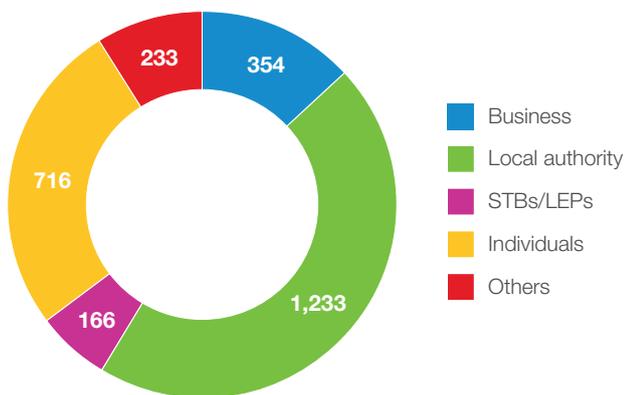


Figure 1.3 - External stakeholder responses

We are increasingly working with subnational transport bodies (STBs), including Midlands Connect, England’s Economic Heartland and Transport for the North, so we can ensure that their developing strategies and planning are integrated into our thinking (and vice versa).

Transport Focus

We commissioned Transport Focus, the road user watchdog, to undertake research on road user priorities. More than 4,400 interviews were undertaken with drivers across the SRN. Figure 1.4 below shows the breakdown by user type and purpose.

Completed interviews		
	3,487	79%
	322	7%
	407	9%
	206	5%
Commuting	501	11%
Business	1,367	31%
Leisure	2,457	56%

Figure 1.4 - Driver sample breakdown

250 fleet managers from a mix of industries, size and regions

The research found that the Solent to Midlands route was one of the highest rated routes, with 71% and 68% of users rating their experience on the motorway and A road sections of the route respectively as either extremely good or fairly good. However, as Table 1.1 shows, 46% of users still experienced problems using the route, with congestion and busy roads/high volume of traffic cited as the two main causes.

The full report has been published on Transport Focus’s website www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/road-to-the-future. We will continue to work closely with Transport Focus to understand customer priorities to ensure that the next RIS reflects their needs.

Experienced problems %	Route impacted	Largest problem	Second largest problem
61%	M25 to Solent		
58%	London Orbital and M23 to Gatwick		
50%	South Coast Central		
46%	Solent to Midlands		
44%	East of England		
43%	Birmingham to Exeter		
41%	South West Peninsula		
41%	North and East Midlands		
40%	London to Scotland East		
40%	South Pennines		
39%	Kent Corridor to M25		
37%	London to Scotland West		
32%	Midlands to Wales and Gloucestershire		 
30%	Felixstowe to Midlands		
30%	South Midlands		
28%	London to Leeds		
27%	London to Wales		
17%	North Pennines		



Congestion/traffic queuing



Roadworks



Delays caused by accidents/roads closed



Roads busy/high volume of traffic

Table 1.1 - Transport Focus summary

2. The route

The Solent to Midlands route links the south of England to the Midlands and runs through or near key cities and towns including Oxford, Bournemouth and Poole, and the south coast ports of Southampton and Portsmouth. The route provides a link between strategic economic gateways and major urban areas. Other key towns and cities nearby or along the route include Northampton, Reading, Newbury, Winchester and Didcot/Abingdon.

The route begins in the south and runs for a total of 304 miles, providing access to areas such as Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, west Berkshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Hampshire. The route is a gateway to a number of airports, including Southampton and Bournemouth International, and many key strategic employment sites.

The route covers a wide area from the outskirts of Winchester along the A34 up to Oxford, along a section of the A43 past Brackley and Towcester, and across Southampton and down to Portsmouth along the A31, M27 and A27 leading to Havant. It is a mixture of A roads and motorway, with sections of 3- and 4-lane motorways.

In 2014 the route handled 4% of national traffic with some 3.2 billion vehicle miles travelled. A high proportion of journeys on the route are commercial trips with traffic transporting freight to the sea ports. In addition, a significant proportion of the traffic is locally based, making shorter trips. To the north, the route interconnects with a number of other motorways including the M40 and the M1 at Northampton.

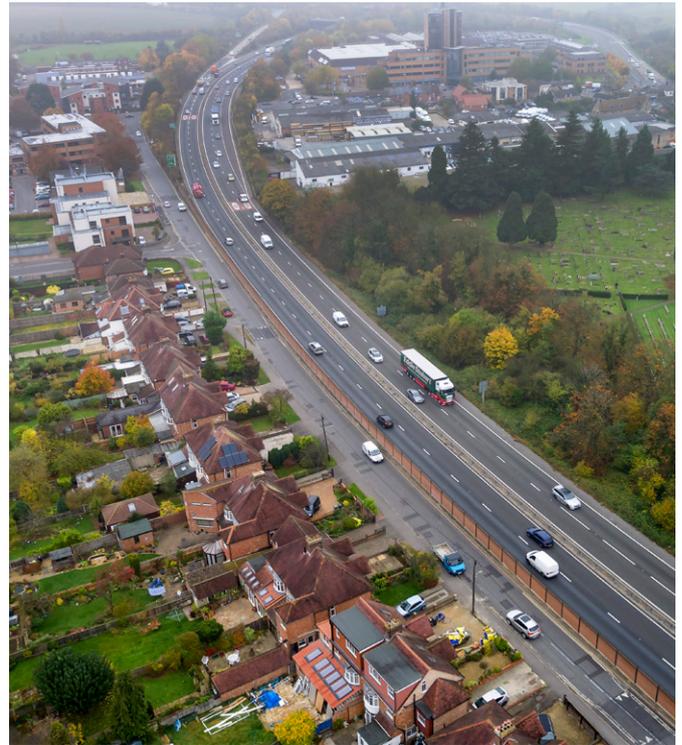


Figure 2.1 - Route overview map

The route is identified as important by local councils and local enterprise partnerships for businesses, communities and local residents as it provides a key means of access to the Midlands. As such it has an important role in supporting the distribution of goods and strategic traffic from the southern ports. The route also supports the retail, tourism and leisure industries by serving key cities and major towns. It provides connections to a number of popular attractions, including Bicester Village and Silverstone Racing Circuit. A large number of leading motorsport companies are located in the area around Silverstone, sometimes called 'Motorsport Valley'.

Nationally, it also provides a link to London, and is a strategic national corridor and freight route where imports and exports come from the ports of Southampton and Portsmouth. These ports provide important international connections for the cruise sector from Southampton as well as being located close to the Rotterdam to Shanghai sea freight route. The route links strategic freight areas around Northampton which generate large numbers of movements in the corridor.

Moreover, the route provides access to a number of important environmental areas including: North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); South Downs National Park; and New Forest National Park. Other sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) in the area include Greenham and Crookham commons and Portsmouth Harbour. Transport connectivity in the region is heavily influenced by the coastal nature of the land to the south, and there are also a number of rivers along or close to the route.



Key link for distribution of traffic from the southern ports and from strategic freight areas around Northampton.



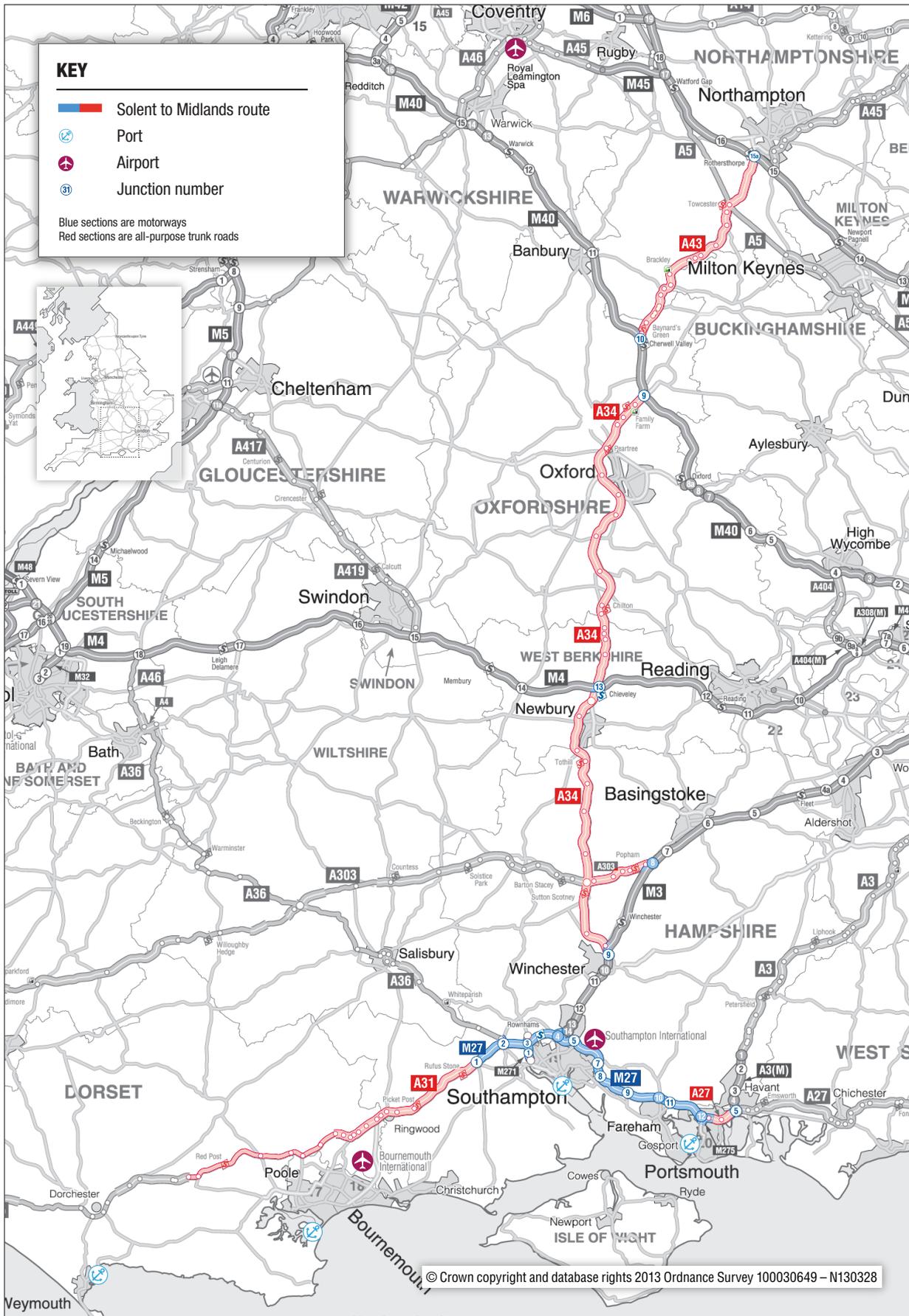


Figure 2.2 - Route Strategy overview map



3. Current constraints and challenges

This chapter outlines the emerging issues raised by stakeholders and is supplemented by Highways England information.

The following text and figures within this chapter provide a summary of the information collected and applied to our strategic themes.



A safe and serviceable network

There are concentrations of incidents at various points on the route. In particular there are clusters of accidents on the M27 junction 8, at the M271/M27 interchange and on the M3 towards Winchester.

Further north between Winchester and Newbury, there are issues around the slip roads with accidents involving HGVs. The slip roads at Bullington Cross for the A34, Newbury Bypass at the A343 and at East Ilsley are also safety hazards. Around Oxford, there are also a number of road merges, which contribute to capacity issues. The M40 junction 9, the A4185 Chilton Junction and the A34 have a record of fatal accidents.

The high proportion of goods traffic travelling from north to south accelerates the deterioration of the road surface along the route. Between Winchester and Newbury, bridges at the M3 Popham interchange have suffered from premature deterioration.

Other problems identified along the route include

- a lack of HGV parking
- limited variable message signs on the corridor



More free-flowing network

Capacity is an issue on sections of the route such as at:

- the M27 where there is a concentration of congestion
- the M271/M27 junction where there are incident concentrations, coupled with the likelihood of future traffic increases

Congestion is an issue along the route at locations such as on the M27 junctions 4 to 11 where congestion is particularly problematic in peak hours. Further north, congestion constrains the area south of Oxford down to the M4.

Congestion issues also occur where multiple routes combine such as along the A34 where high congestion and delays are exacerbated by main junctions lying in close proximity to each other, resulting in a knock-on effect on the local road network. The situation is set to worsen as a result of planned developments along the route particularly near the A34.

There will be construction impacts related to HS2 phase 1 across the A43 at Brackley and around junction 10.



Supporting economic growth

The route is a critical strategic link, linking the south with the Midlands, and as such is vital to the pan-regional economy as well as providing local access to major urban areas along the route.

The evidence base identifies a large number of current and proposed development opportunities, which should come forward either alongside the route, or near to other major highways corridors that take direct access from the route. Along the south of the route, economic growth in the coastal towns will need to be accommodated particularly at the port near Southampton.

The ports at Southampton, Marchwood and Portsmouth are international gateways for freight and passengers alike. Other developments in the south include Eastleigh Riverside, which is a 150-hectare mixed-use. On the A34 corridor between Southampton and Newbury, there are high traffic flows to junction 13 of the M4, reflecting its important strategic role in linking economic growth in the north and south.

Further north towards Oxford on the A34 at the Milton Interchange, the network also needs to accommodate growth at Science Vale as well as locations such as Harwell.



An improved environment

The route passes through a variety of areas experiencing different environmental challenges. For example:

- There are Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) at M37/M271, at Eastleigh, and to the north of the route near Oxford.
- The A34 between the M40 and M4 junctions is also often restricted or closed which has resulted in environmental pollution along the route around Oxford, Bicester, Abingdon, Didcot and through the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- Traffic noise on the A34 has also been identified as a concern, with calls for noise barriers as well as road surface treatment along the A34 particularly around Oxford.

In the south on the M27 around junctions 7 and 8, there are concerns over unnecessary lighting. SSSIs such as St Catherine's Hill in Hampshire have also been affected by works that have bisected the hill, leaving steep embankments that have become dominated by scrub.



A more accessible and integrated network

Analysis of available evidence has identified locations where walking and cycling are most significantly affected by the route. One location where there is a substantial barrier to connectivity is at junction 9 of the M3 (the A34 Winchester junction) which is adjacent to the South Downs National Park and which is a barrier to horse riders, pedestrians and cyclists. There is also a lack of provision for non-motorised user (NMU) crossings on the A34.

The evidence review has also highlighted locations where local highway authorities see opportunities to open up new routes of access to the SRN such as improving access for NMUs. This includes the provision of a number of new or upgraded NMU crossings along the route.

Stakeholders have set out their aspirations to make better use of rail to transport goods between the Midlands and the ports to reduce the volume of goods traffic on the roads.

Solent to Midlands - Route Strategy: Map 1 of 3

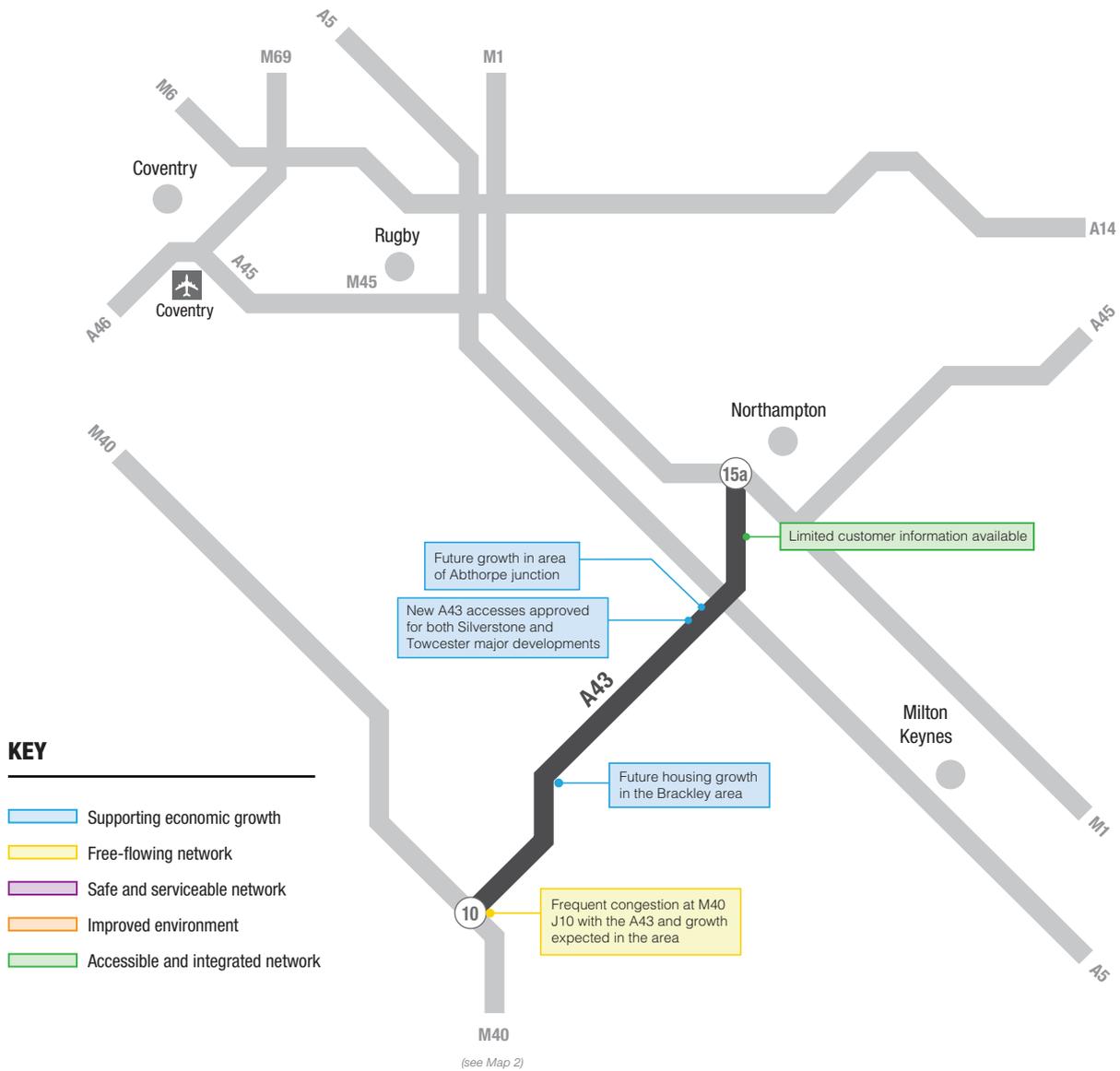


Figure 3.1 - Key challenges for the route

Solent to Midlands - Route Strategy: Map 2 of 3

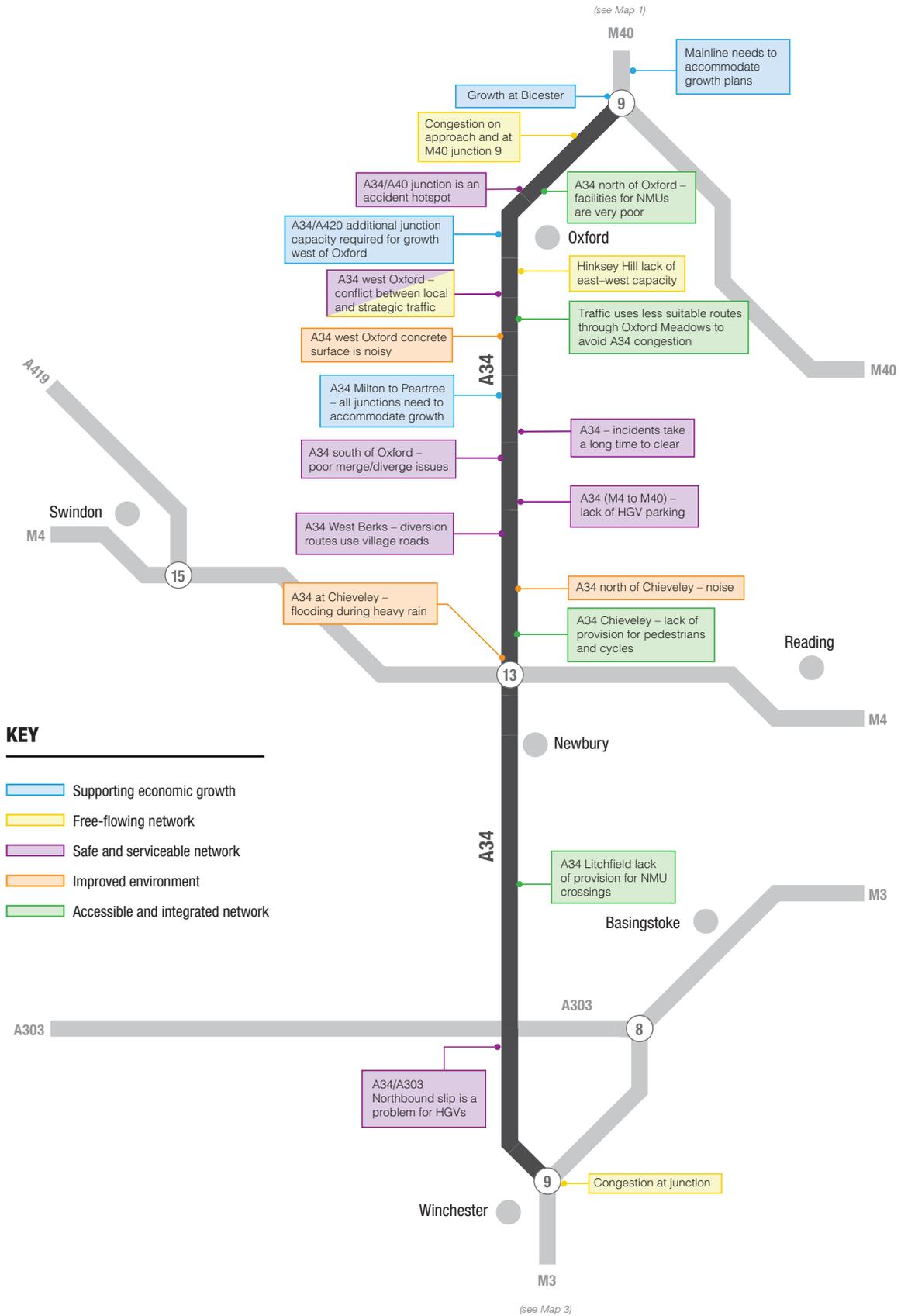


Figure 3.2 - Key challenges for the route

Solent to Midlands - Route Strategy: Map 3 of 3

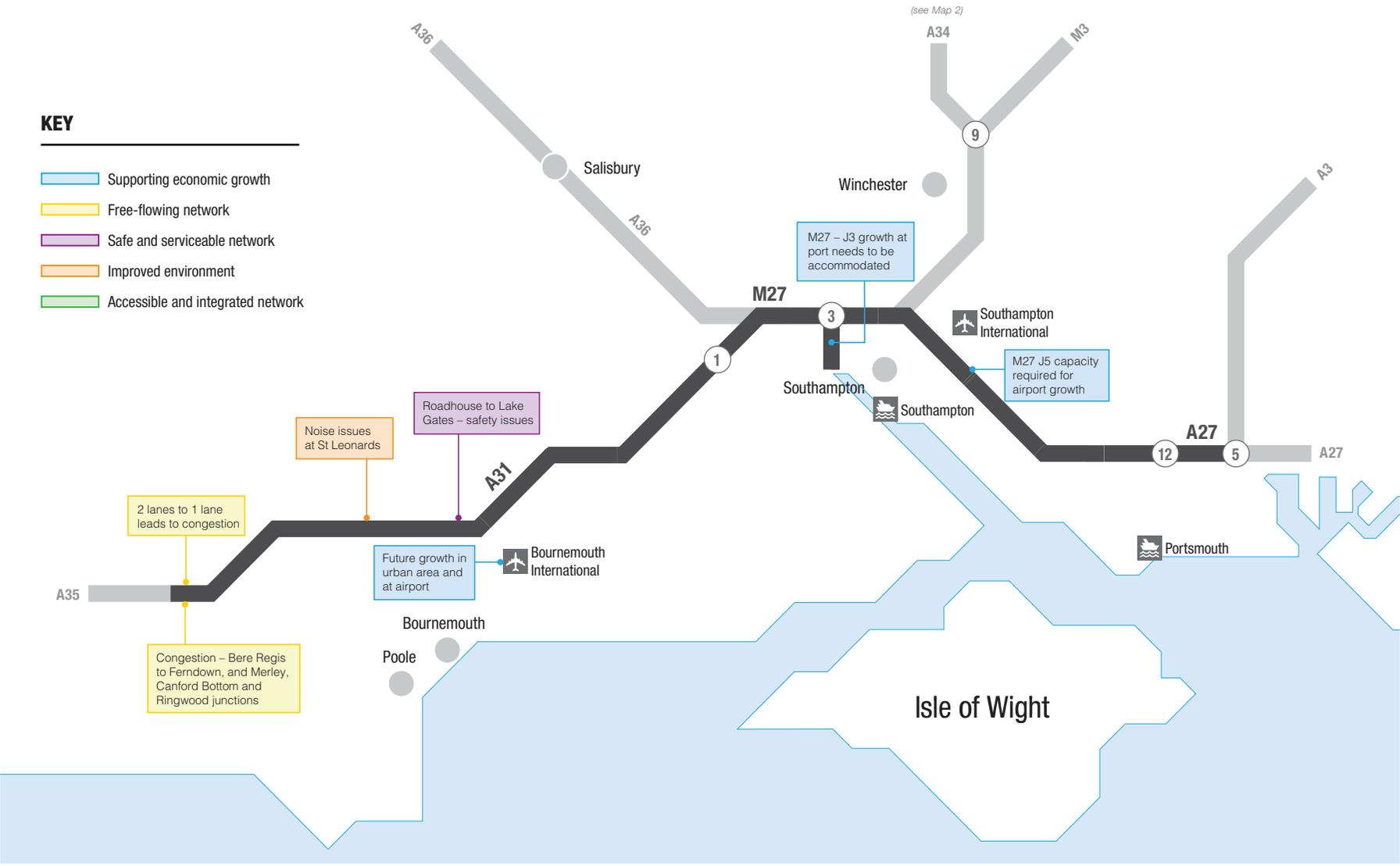


Figure 3.3 - Key challenges for the route

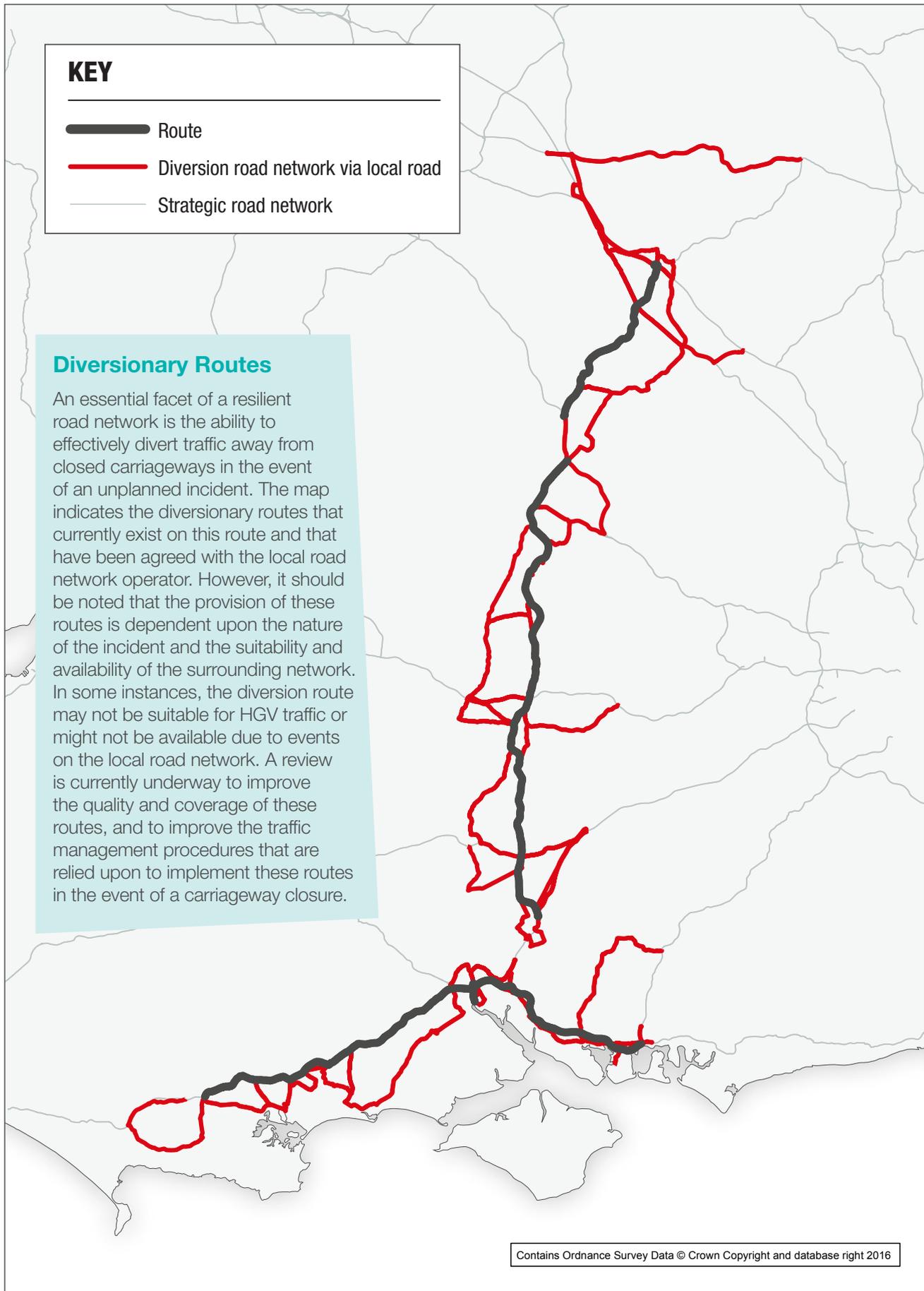


Figure 3.4 - Solent to Midlands diversionary routes

Maintaining the strategic road network

We carry out routine maintenance and renewal of roads, structures and technology to keep the network safe, serviceable and reliable. We also ensure that our contractors deliver a high level of service on the SRN to support operational performance and the long-term integrity of the asset.

The heavy year-round use of all our routes means that they require regular maintenance and inspections for repairs to keep them fully operational, in order to support economic growth. Our maintenance regime focuses on 4 key aspects of the routes: road surfaces, bridges and structures, drainage and earthworks. The summary condition of each on this route is set out below:

Road surface

The surface condition across the route is considered to be sound or having some deterioration with less than 0.5% having severe deterioration that would require focused investigation.

Bridges and structures

The structures across the route are mostly in very good or good condition. According to an analysis of current data, fewer than 1% of our structures are in poor or very poor condition.

Drainage

Drainage assets are represented by both linear assets (for example pipes, channels, ditches, drains) and non-linear assets (for example gullies, chambers). Across the route, drainage assets are considered to be in good condition for linear assets and very good condition for non-linear assets. Of those assets inspected, just under 75% of linear assets have been assessed as having no defects or only superficial defects, with just over 85% of non-linear assets falling in the same categories.

Earthworks

The geotechnical earthworks across the route are considered to be in good condition, with the total length of earthworks that require further investigation amounting to less than 3%.

New assets have an operational 'life', during which, under normal conditions and maintenance, the risk of failure is expected to be low. Beyond this period, the risk of asset failure is expected to increase, although for many types of asset the risk of failure remains low and we do not routinely replace assets solely because they are older than their expected operational life. We use a combination of more regular maintenance and inspection, along with a risk-based approach to ensure that assets remain safe while achieving value for money from our maintenance and renewal activities.



Future developments

We have taken steps to transform our approach to maintenance by establishing an asset management programme that develops and implements the Asset Management Framework for Highways England.

The framework aligns strategic objectives with regional asset management plans and lifecycle asset management plans. It also includes the analysis required to plan the investment and expenditure on the strategic road network during the next road period, developing the business case options for capital renewals. It will provide a clear articulation of the total value that will be delivered by investment in RIS2, including the costs and benefits of delivering the capital renewals programme.

Operations

We are establishing a nationally consistent approach to the management of our operational capability through our Operational Excellence change programme. This will deepen our understanding of how our interventions impact on the performance of the network and on the journeys of our customers. We are using the latest analytical software to process traffic data and gain insight into:

- how our operational services can improve safety and provide security to road users
- how the attendance of a traffic officer has an impact on incident durations
- how information provided by Highways England can benefit road users who plan their journeys beforehand and then while on their journeys

By better understanding our current operational performance, we can create a baseline from which we can identify opportunities for improvement.



4. Current investment plans and growth potential

Investment in the strategic road network can make areas more attractive for inward investment, unlock new sites for employment and housing and facilitate regeneration.

From servicing the UK's logistics needs, linking our manufacturing heartlands and connecting to our international gateways, supporting services-driven activity in high-growth towns and cities, to meeting the needs of our visitor economy, the SRN is critically important to servicing the UK economy.

Economic context

Highways England has been working with a wide range of stakeholders to develop a strategic economic growth plan, which we are calling *The Road to Growth*. This plan explores the economic role of the strategic road network, and aims to explain how we will further increase our contribution to the UK economy. As part of the evidence base for *The Road to Growth*, over 400 economic hotspots – or economic opportunity areas (EOAs) – around the SRN have been identified in consultation with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The figures in this chapter highlight the EOAs which most closely align and are supported by the route.

To inform the development of *The Road to Growth* and assess the relationship between the SRN and economic growth, a suite of evidence reports were completed. These reports were published alongside The Road to Growth discussion paper and were subject to public consultation from November 2016 to January 2017. Alongside the engagement we have undertaken with all LEPs across England, the following evidence reports have ensured we have a more comprehensive economic evidence base and a better understanding of future challenges and opportunities:

- economic growth and the SRN – an evidence review of the relationship between transport investment and economic growth

- commercial development – an assessment of the relationship between the main property sectors and the SRN
- international gateways – a review of principal international gateways (ports and airports) and their contribution to the economy
- socio-economic analysis and future forecasts – mapping of socio-economic data (population, deprivation and employment) and sectoral forecasts up to 2030. This included identification of the likely growth forecasts for all sectors with a particular focus on those sectors heavily dependent on the SRN

The Road to Growth sets out our evidence findings to date and the steps we will take to enhance our enabling role in supporting economic growth.

Innovation

In April 2016, we published our Innovation, Technology and Research Strategy which set out how Highways England will use pioneering behaviours to help support our strategic objectives and create value for customers and stakeholders.

The £150 million Innovation Designated Fund was established to support innovative capital projects and to support developing the use of emerging technologies, new materials and ways of working.

Investment plans

The following figures show the location of Highways England major improvement projects which have previously been announced to help tackle some of the issues on the network. The Highways England website and delivery plan updates should be consulted for the latest information.

The figures also show strategic studies which have been progressed during RIS1, innovation projects and economic opportunity areas.

Solent to Midlands - Route Strategy: Map 1 of 3

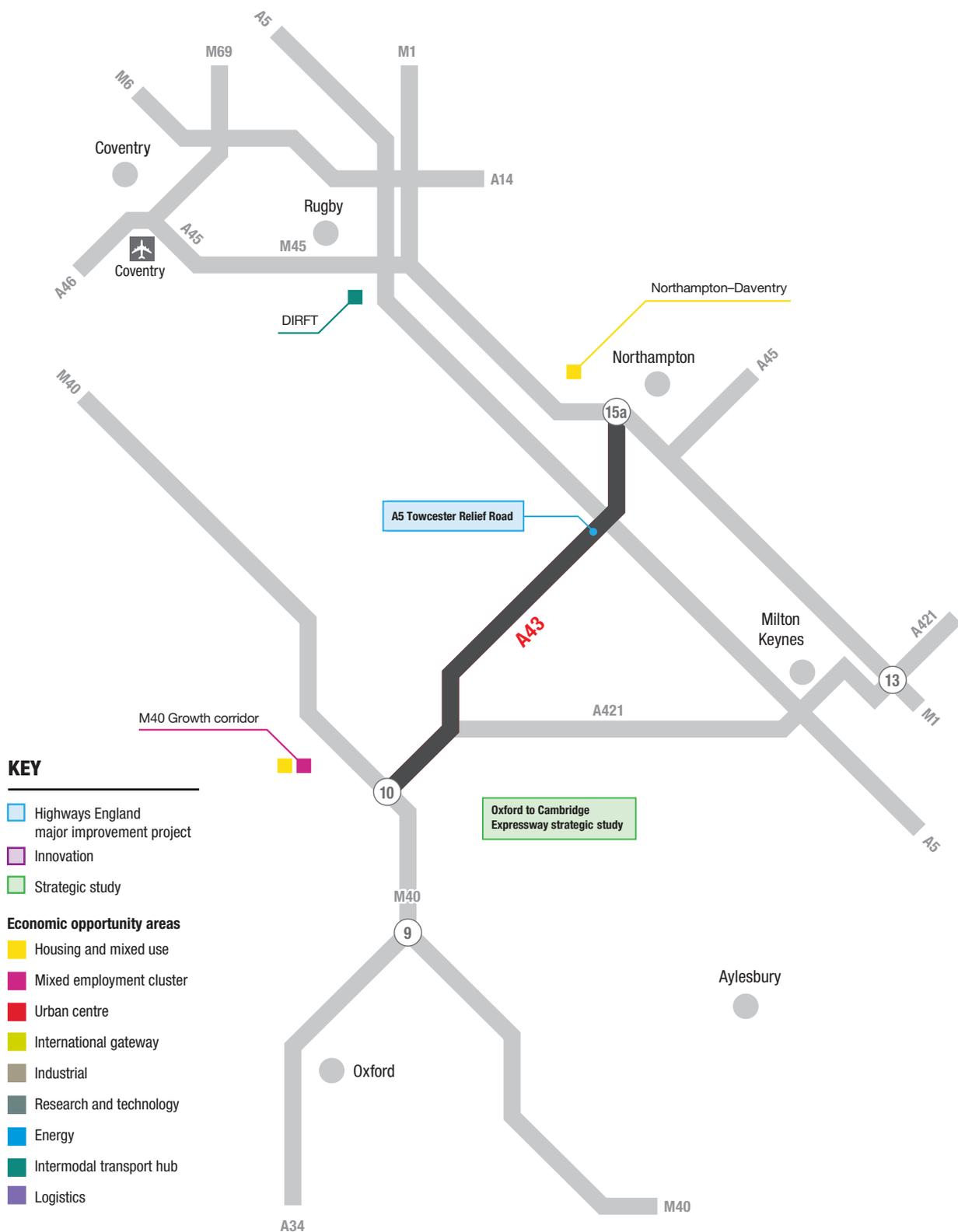


Figure 4.1 - Investment plans and economic opportunity areas

Solent to Midlands - Route Strategy: Map 2 of 3



Figure 4.2 - Investment plans and economic opportunity areas

Solent to Midlands - Route Strategy: Map 3 of 3

KEY

Highways England major improvement project

Innovation

Strategic study

Economic opportunity areas

Housing and mixed use

Mixed employment cluster

Urban centre

International gateway

Industrial

Research and technology

Energy

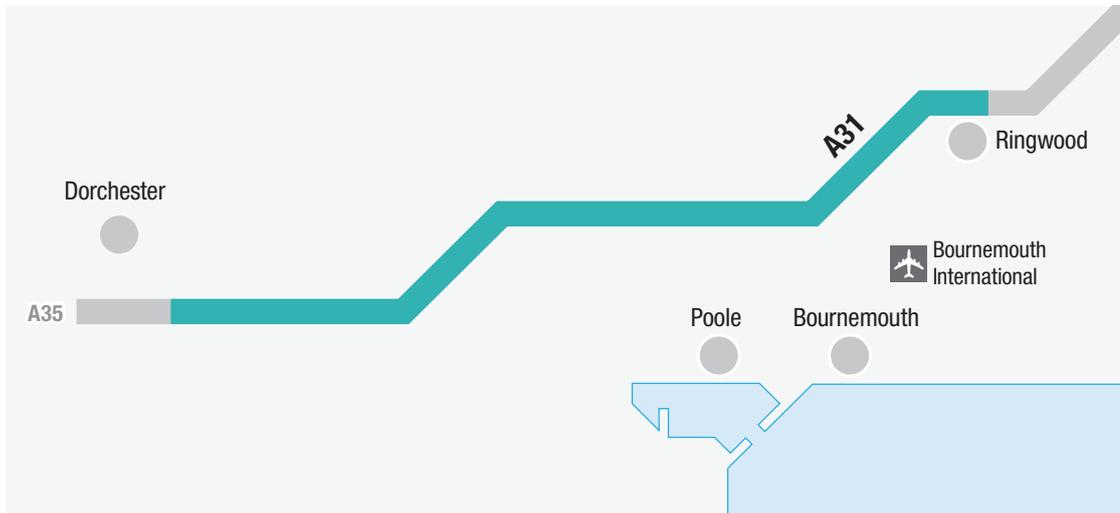
Intermodal transport hub

Logistics



Figure 4.3 - Investment plans and economic opportunity areas

A35/A31 Honiton to Ringwood



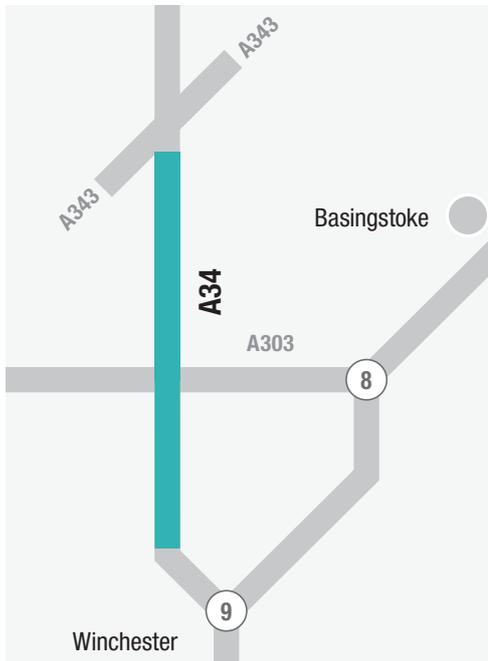
- There are incident concentrations on A31 between Roadhouse and Lake Gates (Wimborne).
- There are noise issues along A31 through St Leonards.
- There are congestion issues on the A31 between Bere Regis and Ferndown, also at Merley, Canford Bottom and Ameyford junctions.
- Growth projections will affect the A31 around Bournemouth and Poole.

Southampton to Winchester: Fawley freight line



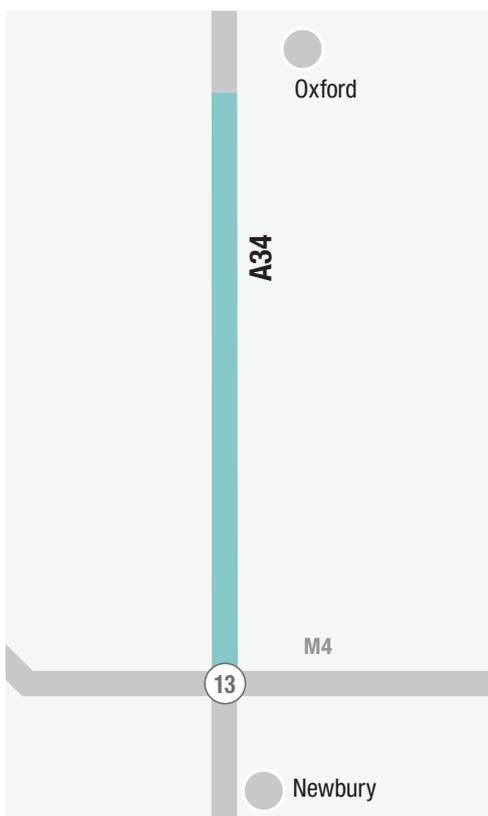
- A study has identified the challenges associated with reintroducing passenger services along the Fawley freight line in Hampshire.
- While the current study will look at the opportunities to enhance ferry services linking Fawley, Warsash, Hythe, Southampton and Marchwood, the ability of these services to deliver significant travel capacity or modal shift are limited.

A34 Winchester to Newbury



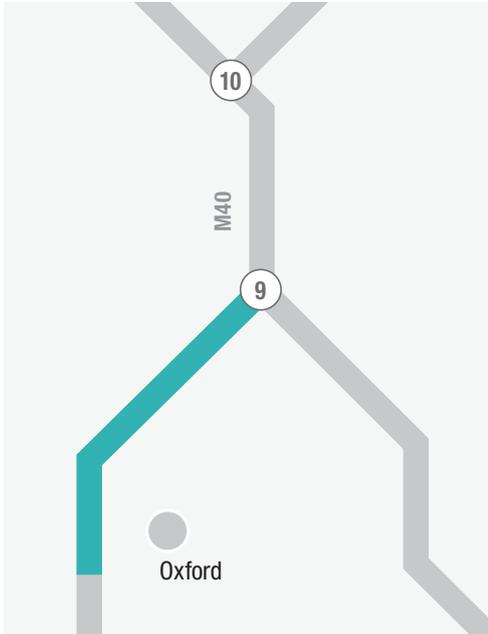
- The A34 will remain a key route for north–south freight movement. With increased development in and around Basingstoke, the A34/A343 junction may present a future constraint to economic growth.
- Further congestion is anticipated in the longer term due to increased traffic volumes on the route, particularly at the junction between the A303 and A34.
- There is an incident cluster site for traffic merging on the A34 northbound from Bullington Cross.
- There are NMU issues at Litchfield.
- There is a lack of provision of HGV laybys.

A34/M4 to Oxford



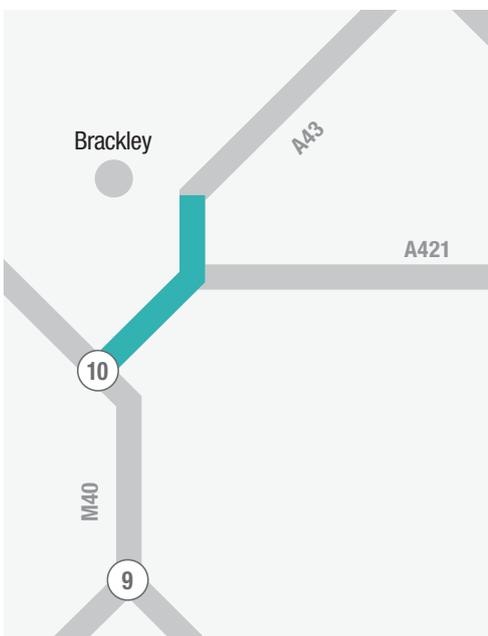
- There is persistent and increasing traffic congestion and incident concentrations on the A34 from the M4 to Oxford.
- There are increasing development pressures from the 'Knowledge Spine' (an economic opportunity area) of Science Vale, Oxford and Bicester.
- Growth is expected at locations such as Harwell, Milton Park, Didcot and Banbury, which is likely to increase demand on the A34.
- Rail electrification along the route adjacent to A34 would need to be phased in to avoid potential engineering constraints preventing early delivery of improvements to the A34 south of Lodge Hill.
- There are severance issues for NMUs and flooding incidents at Chieveley.

A34 Oxford to M40 junction 9



- There are increasing development pressures from the Knowledge Spine (an economic opportunity area) of Science Vale, Oxford and Bicester.
- Growth is expected at locations such as Harwell, Milton Park, Didcot and Banbury, which is likely to add to demand on the A34.

A43 Brackley to M40



- Slow and/or unreliable journeys on A43 have negative impacts on strategic growth sites and especially planned future employment sites. Future growth is likely to be constrained.
- Future growth could worsen congestion and recurring delays at existing junctions.
- There are possible safety impacts on mainline motorway traffic from queuing at M40 junction 10.
- Reliability/congestion issues will have a detrimental impact on plans for the Oxford–Milton Keynes–Cambridge growth corridor.
- There are severance issues for NMUs along the A43 corridor.

6. Next steps

Our findings from this and other Route Strategies, as well as other research, will inform our first Strategic Road Network Initial Report which is to be published later this year. This will form the basis of a public consultation, which in turn will feed into decision-making on the next Road Investment Strategy (RIS2).

We are looking ahead to the next RIS and how we can support the Secretary of State in ensuring that value for money investments are made in the road network. The process for developing RIS2 is set out in our licence, and is in 3 phases: research, decision and mobilisation.

We are currently in the first phase – **research phase** – where we are gathering wide-ranging evidence on the state of the network and how we can ensure that improvements have maximum impact. The series of Route Strategies, of which this is one, is an important part of this phase alongside the outcomes of strategic studies which looked at particularly complicated problems on parts of the network and how to tackle them. Another key source of evidence is the Strategic Economic Growth Plan (*The Road to Growth*), which examines where and how the SRN can help support economic growth. This will emphasise that sectors dependent on the road network employ 7.4 million people, that we are already doing a great deal to support growth and that we want to do even more.

Now that this series of Route Strategies is published, we will continue our engagement with stakeholders, including other transport providers and authorities, on how best to address problems and maximise opportunities. For example, in working towards seamless end-to-end journeys for our customers, we will be focussing on how the strategic road network links with local roads and other modes of transport.

Findings from the research phase will feed into Highways England's Strategic Road Network Initial Report, expected to be published later this year, which will outline Highways England's ambitions for the network across 2020–2025 and beyond. The Initial Report will be the subject of public consultation.

In the **decision phase**, the consultation feedback will assist the Department for Transport in developing RIS2. In turn we will develop a Strategic Business Plan (SBP) setting out how we will deliver RIS2 as a business. Both the RIS and SBP will be reviewed by the regulator of roads, the Office of Rail and Road, to ensure that we have made the most efficient decisions. The final documents are to be published in 2019.



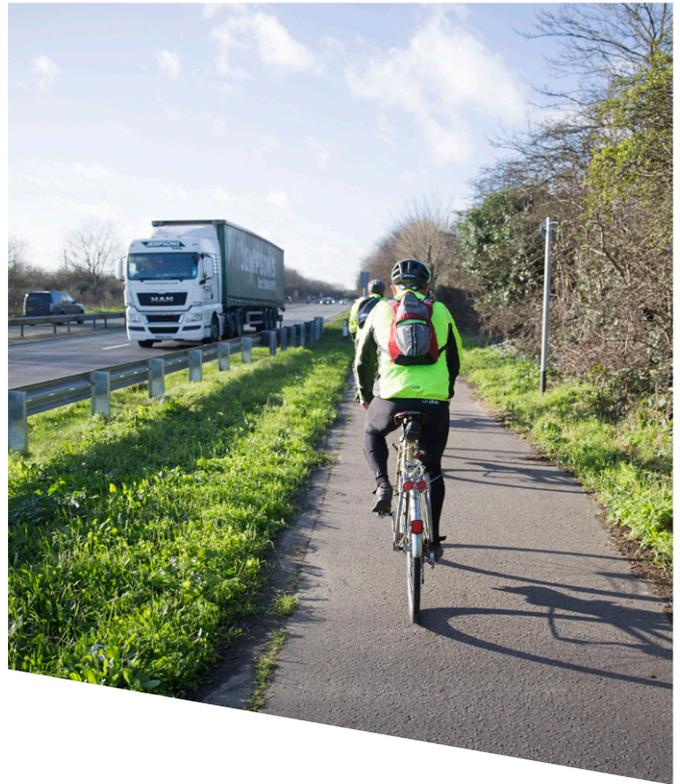
Figure 6.1 - RIS2 high-level process

In the final **mobilisation phase**, we will set out a Delivery Plan with a detailed programme of investment to be carried out in 2020 to 2025 on the basis of the commitments in RIS2.

Continued investment in modernisation, maintenance and operation will further improve the road network on top of the measures and schemes currently being undertaken, and will allow us to further support users of the strategic road network and the UK's economy. The rigorous process of developing RIS2 should ensure that the best use is made of taxpayers' money and that investments have the maximum impact.

The views and perspectives of different stakeholders, including motorists, are important to us. Stakeholders may also wish to contact one of the partner organisations. For example, stakeholders can keep up to date with Transport Focus' work, by signing up to their monthly electronic newsletter *Road User Voice*. Alternatively, stakeholders may prefer to make their views known through one of the many organisations involved in RIS2. They include the AA, RAC, RAC Foundation, Road Haulage Association, Freight Transport Association, Campaign for Better Transport, Confederation of British Industry and many others.

We will provide information about the process and emerging findings at events for representative organisations in spring 2017. At the same time, we are developing the dialogue with emerging STBs, local government, LEPs, business groups and environmental organisations. We want to align our analysis, and eventually our decision-making, with that of other organisations, so that we can maximise the benefit of investment, for example focusing on improving the interconnectivity between different modes and between the strategic and local road networks. This should lead to a richer discussion during public consultation on the Strategic Road Network Initial Report.





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