

Environment Strategy

Our approach

Foreword

Highways England is a new organisation, launched in April 2015. We are responsible for England's strategic road network, and we have an ambitious programme to deliver the Government's Road Investment Strategy. This investment is designed to maximise our road network's support to the UK economy, and to support the quality of life of communities up and down the country. As we do this we will ensure that all activity on our roads is undertaken in a way that meets existing environmental legislative requirements and not only avoids or minimises harm, but ultimately improves the environment.

This strategy is designed to communicate our approach to improving the environment to our key stakeholders. We are keen for partners to help us protect and improve the environment and work with us as we develop and implement solutions to environmental challenges.

This is our first Environment Strategy as Highways England and with it we intend to promote positive change and to strive for the best possible environmental outcomes.

Through the operation, maintenance and improvement of our roads, our aspiration is:

“a strategic road network working more harmoniously with its surroundings to deliver an improved environment.”

This is our vision for the environment, and we are committed in our resolve to deliver it.

Introduction

Highways England is a public sector company, owned by the Government. The primary role of Highways England is to operate, maintain and improve the motorways and major A roads in England (known as the strategic road network). This network covers 4,300 miles, with 85 billion miles of journeys made on it per year – it is the most heavily used part of the national road network, carrying a third of all traffic and two thirds of all freight.

As set out in the Road Investment Strategy¹, the Government's ambition for the next 25 years is to revolutionise our roads and create a modern strategic road network that supports a modern Britain, making a real difference to people's lives and businesses' prospects. The Government is investing a total of £11.35 billion in the enhancement and long-term maintenance of the network in the first Road Period (2015/16 – 2019/20), including 112 individual schemes.

This not only presents an environmental challenge, but provides a huge opportunity to deliver these schemes in greater harmony with the environment than in the past. To help achieve this, the Government has ring-fenced £225 million in an Environment Fund and £75 million in an Air Quality Fund, to deliver specific environmental improvements across our network in Road Period 1. The funding will be used to retrofit the existing network in order to tackle existing problems and deliver enhancements.

This, the Highways England Environment Strategy for the first Road Period, sets the vision that will guide our environmental actions and activities over the next five years. It has been developed in line with the Road Investment Strategy, our Strategic Business Plan², Delivery Plan³ and Licence⁴ (see Figure 1), and aligns with our legal obligations.

¹ DfT (March 2015). Road Investment Strategy: for the 2015/16 – 2019/20 Road Period. ² Highways England Strategic Business Plan 2015-2020.

³ Highways England Delivery Plan 2015-2020. Highways England. ⁴ DfT (April 2015) Highways England licence

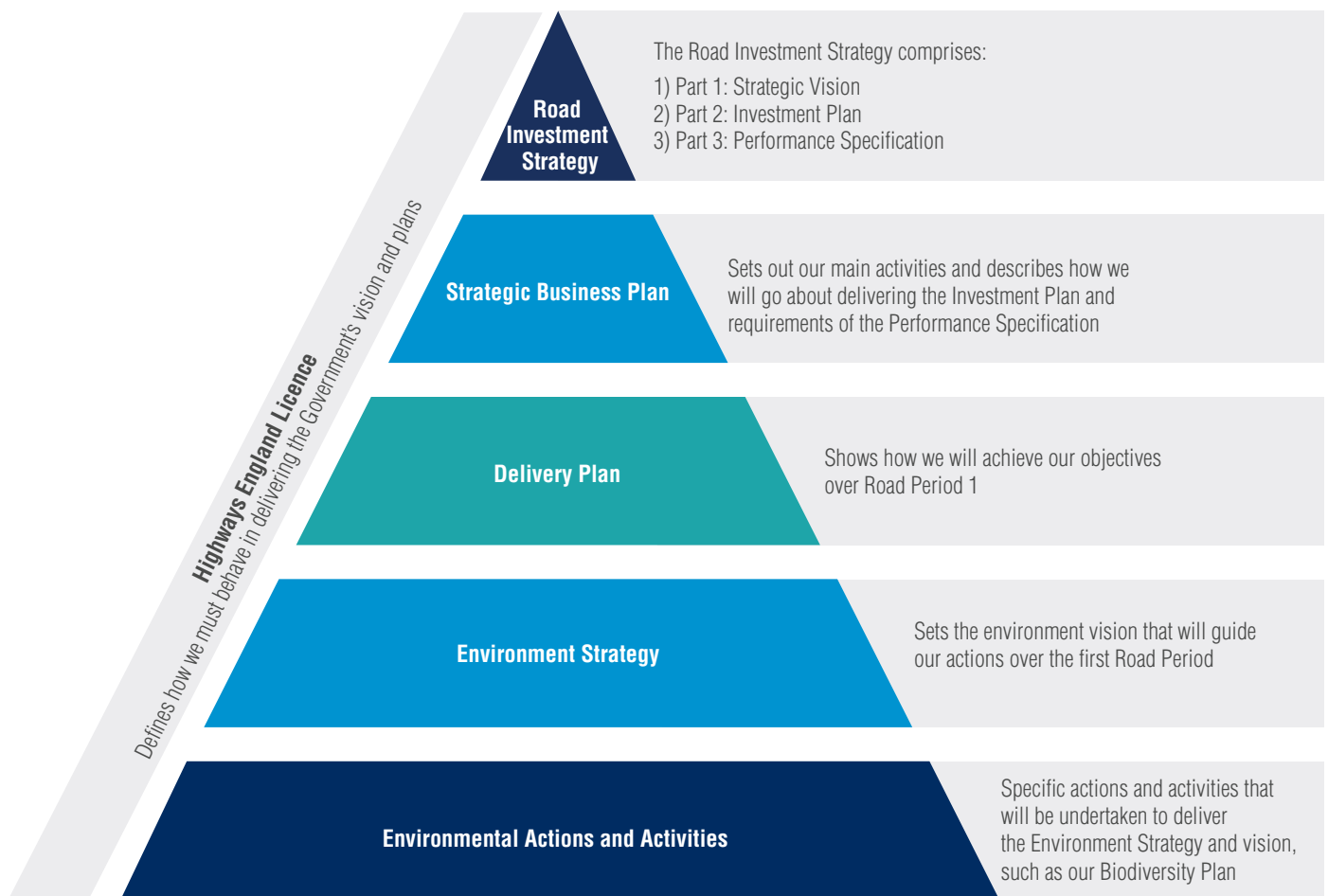


Figure 1

It will sit alongside and complement our other strategies, such as our Sustainable Development, Litter, Cycling and Asset Management Strategies.

This strategy outlines our commitment to improving our environmental outcomes. In doing this, it seeks to help protect, manage and enhance the quality of the surrounding environment, with a focus on people and the built, natural and historic environment. It will be delivered through all aspects of our business and in particular the operation, maintenance and improvement of our network.

Vision for the environment

In recent years we have made significant progress on reducing the environmental impacts of our network. For example, as a result of quiet surfacing, early relocation of affected species, and more intelligent design and landscaping, our performance has improved and surrounding communities have been less affected. However, there is much still to be done.

With our launch as Highways England, we have been refining our environmental focus so that enhancement, rather than reduced harm, underpins our approach. By rebuilding our focus in this way, we intend to deliver improved environmental outcomes on the strategic road network and our vision for the environment is at the heart of this:

“A strategic road network working more harmoniously with its surroundings to deliver an improved environment.”

Strategic Levers

We have identified six strategic levers that, when applied, will help us achieve our environment vision. The levers are deliberately high level and cross-cutting, being applicable throughout the whole of our organisation, supply chain and with our stakeholders. They have been developed in consultation with key stakeholders and are set out in the table overleaf.

Levers	Definition	Examples of the Lever in Action
Leadership and Culture	Embedding a culture of environmental improvement at all levels within the business and being a trusted and influential environmental organisation in everything we do.	<p>Accountable leadership - provide positive, proactive and engaging leadership at all levels of the organisation on environmental issues.</p> <p>Capable employees - increase environmental skills and capabilities within our organisation, at all levels.</p> <p>Customer-focused delivery - Support our employees to build stronger, more effective relationships that meet the needs of our customers (both external and internal).</p>
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	Driving environmental improvement through the recognition of its benefits to safety, health and wellbeing.	<p>Deliver a reduced exposure to noise pollution through our commitment to mitigate noise in at least 1,150 Noise Important Areas over Road Period 1.</p> <p>Invest the £75 million designated Air Quality Fund in a range of projects to improve air quality and help to ensure the air around the network is clean and healthy for our customers and neighbours.</p> <p>Deliver improved safety by improving resilience to flooding and reducing flood risk to communities adjacent to the network.</p>
Engaging Stakeholders	Collaborating with others to provide increased environmental benefits over those that we can achieve alone, whilst delivering value for money.	<p>Regular engagement with our stakeholders on our environmental activities. For example, on the forward programme for the designated Environment Fund, and associated action plans that follow this strategy.</p> <p>Identify joint projects with our stakeholders that have common objectives and mutual benefits and can be implemented in the first Road Period using the designated Environment Fund.</p> <p>Identify and share best practice and innovation to improve environmental performance. For example, continue to meet with scientific experts, local and national government, and wider stakeholder groups to discuss how best to achieve better air quality, taking into account current legislation.</p>
Design Quality	Putting environment at the heart of design quality.	<p>Through research and innovation, continue to improve the design of our schemes.</p> <p>Through our Design Panel, ensure that design excellence in the landscape, engineering, and built environment aspects of our construction projects is achieved.</p> <p>Working with our stakeholders invest up to £7 million through our 'legacy initiative' on major improvement projects to deliver facilities and design features that go beyond what would be expected from routine assessment and design practices.</p>
Asset Knowledge	Bringing together accurate information on our assets and surroundings to enable decisions to be made which improve environmental performance.	<p>Good knowledge of the condition and performance of the existing asset base. For example, improve the depth and breadth of our environmental data to enable more effective information sharing and asset management.</p> <p>Improve our knowledge of the environmental baseline to identify existing environmental problems that can be improved using the designated £225 million Environment Fund. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify works that will halt the loss to biodiversity and contribute to the longer term ambition of no net loss in Road Period 2; such as reviewing opportunities for contributing to restoration areas such as Nature Improvement Areas. ■ Identify existing environmental problems where mitigation can be introduced to specifically reduce visual intrusion to our neighbours. ■ Use our existing information on priority outfall, soak away, culvert and flood risk hotspots to develop a programme of interventions. ■ Review the status for assets identified in the Department for Transport's Historic Buildings Annual report, and identify a future programme of interventions.
Appraisal, Evaluation and Performance	Ensuring a full understanding of the benefits of improved environmental performance is taken into account in decision making.	Develop a broader range of new measures that reflect our environmental performance, linked with appraisal and evaluation processes, that allow us to demonstrate clearly what activities have been undertaken, and how effective they have been in improving environmental outcomes.

Implementing the Strategic Levers

The strategic levers will be applied to the following environmental topic areas, as set out in our Delivery Plan:

- Noise
- Air quality
- Biodiversity
- Landscape
- Water quality and flooding
- Cultural heritage

Additional 'environmental' topics that are not listed above are covered in other strategies produced by Highways England. For example, carbon emissions, climate change and waste are covered in our Sustainable Development Strategy; litter is covered within our Litter Strategy; cycling within our Cycling Strategy; and non-motorised users within our Accessibility and Inclusion Strategy.

All strategic levers will make a contribution towards our environment vision, with benefits to customers. However, the contribution of some will be felt sooner than others.

Through regular engagement with our internal and external partners and stakeholders, we will continue to review our activities in order to devise the most suitable methods of implementing the strategic levers and prioritise resulting actions throughout Road Period 1.

Highways England will develop an Environmental Action Plan that will set out our activities and their implementation. Where appropriate, specific action plans will be produced, such as our Biodiversity Plan⁵ and Air Quality Action Plan.

We will monitor progress of the Action Plan annually and communicate this to our stakeholders. Our existing Key Performance Indicators and Performance Indicators, along with development of new metrics, will enable our environmental performance to be effectively measured.

We will review this Environment Strategy following publication of the next Road Investment Strategy.

⁵Highways England (June 2015). Our plan to protect and increase biodiversity.

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