



Department  
for Transport

# Consultation on 'The Strategic Road Network and the Delivery of Sustainable Development'

February 2013

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# Foreword



The strategic road network is the busiest in Europe carrying one-third of all road traffic and two-thirds of freight traffic in England. Approximately four million vehicles use the network each day, and an ever increasing demand for travel is likely to see that number rise.

The network is a nationally strategic asset which performs a key role in supporting the sustainability of the UK's economy. It allows existing business and communities are able to thrive whilst promoting economic growth and enabling new development.

It also plays a key role in achieving social aspirations by contributing to wider sustainability and health objectives; improving quality of life by connecting people with the workplace, shopping, leisure activities, education, health facilities and social services. When used well in support of planned development it can help link sustainable locations and by operating safely and efficiently, contribute to environmental objectives.

This consultation seeks your views on proposals for a policy that aims to remove unnecessary bureaucracy and regulation where it is sensible to do so, placing more power in the hands of communities and Local Authorities and to enable them to make decisions that are right for them.

It seeks to remove unnecessary burdens and restrictions faced by businesses and communities, creating more opportunity for them to realise their aspirations.

I encourage you to consider the proposals set out here and to contribute to the development of a new policy that will ensure that the strategic road network remains a valuable national asset that benefits us all.

I look forward to hearing your views.

Stephen Hammond MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport

# Executive summary

The Highways Agency is an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport (DfT), and is responsible for operating, maintaining and improving the strategic road network (SRN) in England on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport.

The Agency also has a responsibility to contribute to the Government's wider economic, social and environmental objectives, in particular the enabling of sustainable economic growth.

The strategic road network is a nationally strategic asset which performs a key role in promoting the growth of the UK economy with approximately four million vehicles using the network each day.

Over 80 per cent of all goods travel by road with around two-thirds of large goods vehicle traffic carried on the network. Therefore it is vital that the SRN should be able to continue to support existing economic activity as well as enabling growth, whilst at the same time the safety of road users must not be compromised.

This consultation is to seek your views on the revision of policy on the way the Highways Agency engages with the planning system, fulfils its remit to be a delivery partner to sustainable economic growth whilst maintaining, managing and operating a safe and efficient strategic road network.

The draft circular explains how the Highways Agency will achieve that aim, reducing regulation and removing restrictions wherever possible so as to enable businesses, communities and individuals to contribute to growth while at the same time ensuring that the network continues to operate safely and efficiently.

The draft policy circular, when adopted, will replace two current policy circulars – DfT and DCLG jointly published Circular 02/2007 *Planning and the Strategic Road Network*, and DfT Circular 01/2008 *Policy on Service Areas and other Roadside Facilities on Motorways and All-purpose Trunk Roads in England*.

The circular will also incorporate policy on specific development types, thereby creating a single transport policy document. It sets out the Government's requirements of transport policy only to the extent that it is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so.

The document does not seek to address procedural matters. These are covered in the Protocols and Improvement Plan that can be found on the Highways Agency website at <http://www.highways.gov.uk/our-road-network/planning/>

# How to respond

The consultation period began on 11 February 2013 and will run until 25 March 2013. Please ensure that your response reaches us before the closing date. If you would like further copies of this consultation document, it can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/dft> or you can contact Ian Askew if you would like alternative formats (Braille, audio CD, etc).

Please send consultation responses to

Ian Askew  
Floor 10, The Cube,  
199 Wharfside Street  
Birmingham  
B1 1RN  
0121 678 8366  
Email address: [planningconsultation@highways.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:planningconsultation@highways.gsi.gov.uk)

When responding, please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If responding on behalf of a larger organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents and, where applicable, how the views of members were assembled.

If you have questions or require any further clarification after you have read the consultation documents please contact:

Ian Askew  
Floor 10, The Cube,  
199 Wharfside Street  
Birmingham  
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0121 678 8366  
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Please note it will not be possible to respond to any questions which are included within your responses to the consultation.

## Freedom of Information

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

If you want information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.

In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information, we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act (DPA) and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

# Background

There have been significant changes made to national planning policy and legislation under the current Government. The Localism Act 2011 removed regional strategies and regional planning bodies and introduced the potential for business and community led sub-district level planning; it extended the duty to cooperate to all stages of the planning process; and amended the institutions and processes involved in determining applications for major infrastructure.

The National Planning Policy Framework has replaced well over a thousand of pages of policy and guidance with a single document setting out the principles and priorities for planning and on the determination of proposals for new development. It identifies the economic, social, and environmental role of sustainable development, and emphasises in particular that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and economic growth.

The Highways Agency is a statutory consultee on planning applications that may impact on the strategic road network, and a named consultee to the local planning process. The Highways Agency is also a statutory consultee to applications for development consent for nationally significant infrastructure projects. It identifies and promotes highway improvement schemes that help support economic growth.

Further, as a Government Agency and named statutory consultee, the Agency has a Business Plan remit to act as a partner in delivering sustainable economic growth.

The current DfT Circular setting out planning policy in relation to the strategic road network, and a separate Circular covering roadside facilities policy, have been reviewed to reflect the evolution of the planning system. It is proposed that they be replaced by new policy setting out how the Agency will balance delivery of its objectives of managing and maintaining a safe and efficient strategic road network with that of and being a delivery partner to, and enabler of economic growth.

# The proposals

The draft Circular '*The Strategic Road Network and the Delivery of Sustainable Development*' contains a number of changes from the policy set out in Circulars 02/2007 and 01/2008.

The proposed changes are deregulatory in nature, although some regulation from previous policies has been retained where it is essential to ensure the integrity of the strategic road network. Elsewhere, regulation has been removed, where it is within the remit of the policy to do so, and devolved to Local Authorities and other local decision makers as appropriate so as to eliminate duplication by way of additional authorisation from the Department for Transport and/or the Highways Agency.

Both Circulars require replacement with the aim of producing new policy that aligns to the NPPF, promotes development and economic growth, and that devolves decisions for determination at the local level wherever this is appropriate. The key policy issues to note are that the document -

- Reflects the changes brought about by the Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including the introduction of Local Enterprise Partnerships and the removal of regional level planning.
- Places more emphasis on the Highways Agency's role as a delivery partner to growth and as a development enabler; the role that the SRN can play in enabling economic growth; and the removal of protectionist and/or negative statements that may be seen as a block on development.
- Removes the expectation that the traffic impact on the SRN as a result of development should be mitigated so as to be no worse off after the 10 year review period
- Allows any capacity within the network to be used after traffic demand has been managed down through the implementation of travel plans and other appropriate measures.

- Provides that where proposals would take a road or junction over capacity after impact reduction measures, mitigation will only be required to the extent that capacity is adequate at time of opening, thus removing the requirement to cater for future background growth
- Through this, frees up capacity to be available unless the cumulative impacts are severe.<sup>1</sup>
- Eases restrictions on new access/junctions on motorways to enable delivery of strategic growth where this is identified as appropriate using a sequential approach during Local Plan formation.
- Consolidates policy and advice contained in other documents concerned with specific development types, so as to provide a single source document for Transport Policy related to the SRN.
- Significantly simplifies policy for the signed roadside facility sector, such that it is consistent with the statement in NPPF that “the primary function of roadside facilities for motorists should be to support the safety and welfare of the road user”.
- In respect of roadside facilities, retains requirements for only minimum standards and facilities in the interest of the safety and comfort of the motorist, ensuring conformity with the statement in the NPPF, leaving other issues to be decided by local planning and market forces.
- Subject to junction separation standards, removes minimum spacing requirements between signed roadside facilities, taking out a significant policy block on new sites, creating the potential for greater sector competition and customer choice.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this applies to road link and junction capacity in respect of vehicle numbers and traffic flows; other social and environmental effects and physical impacts will still need to be mitigated where it is appropriate to do so.

# Consultation questions

1. Does the proposed Circular explain clearly the Highways Agency's commitment to engage at all stages with the planning system, and how this will happen?
2. Does the proposed Circular achieve the correct balance between supporting economic development and ensuring that the strategic road network fulfills its function of providing safe and efficient movement for current and future users?
3. Does the proposed Circular signpost clearly the criteria that the Agency will use in evaluating planning proposals that affect the Strategic Road Network?
4. Do you agree with the approach to use of existing road capacity, and the provision of new capacity?
5. Do you agree with relaxation of policy on new accesses to motorways and other strategic routes? Please explain the reasoning for your view and provide any evidence you may have to support it.
6. Do you agree that it is appropriate to remove from the Circular minimum spacing criteria for roadside facilities, subject to junction separation standards, leaving consideration of such matters to planning authorities and commercial enterprise/opportunity?
7. Do you agree with the removal of a restriction on retail space at motorway service areas, as a matter to be assessed and decided according to demand through the planning system? Please explain the reasoning for your view and provide any evidence you may have to support it.
8. Do you agree with the minimum requirements for signing of the various roadside facilities? What should be included or excluded? Please explain the reasoning for your view and provide any evidence you may have to support it.

# What will happen next?

A summary of responses, including the next steps, will be published within three months of the consultation closing on <https://www.gov.uk/dft>

Paper copies will be available on request.

All responses will be considered and collated to identify key issues or common themes. We anticipate publication of a revised policy document in the mid to late part of 2013.

# Annex A Impact assessment

The proposals contained in the draft policy have been assessed as low impact and will require a full final stage impact assessment to be cleared prior to publication of an adopted policy.

The financial implications of each element of the proposed policy, along with changes from the previous, have been subject of initial light touch assessment using an early stage impact assessment to consider options and analyse the possible impacts. This has been used to develop the consultation document and questions that will be seeking further information to inform the final stage impact assessment which must receive full formal clearance prior to the publication of revised policy.

When responding to the consultation, please comment giving supporting evidence wherever possible.

Please also suggest any alternative methods for reaching the objectives and highlight any possible unintended consequences of the policy, and practical enforcement or implementation issues.

# Annex B Consultation principles

The consultation is being conducted in line with the Government's key consultation principles which are listed below. Further information is available on the Better Regulation Executive website at <https://update.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/consultation-principles-guidance>

If you have any comments about the consultation process please contact:

Consultation Co-ordinator  
Department for Transport  
Zone 1/14 Great Minster House  
London SW1P 4DR  
Email [consultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:consultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk)

## Consultation principles

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before;
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and consult with those who are affected;
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy; and
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

The DfT is running this consultation for a six week period. We believe that this is sufficient time for groups and individuals who have an interest in this policy area to consider the proposals and provide substantive responses. The consultation is aimed primarily at informed practitioners in Local Highway and Planning Authorities, and private developers. Other interested parties would also have sufficient technical knowledge to respond within this timetable.