

Essex County Council
Cabinet Office
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Chelmsford
Essex CM1 1LX



Richard Coates
Head of Highways Monitoring Development
Office of Rail and Road
3rd Floor
One Kemble Street
London
W2B 4AN

Date: 12 June 2015
Our ref:
Your ref:

Dear Richard,

Thank you for the opportunity to share Essex County Council's views on the new role for the Office of Rail and Road in monitoring Highways England. Our official response is provided as an appendix to this letter.

I wanted to take this opportunity to address the wider role of Highways England and ORR and their relationship with highways authorities including Essex. Essex County Council has ambitious plans to realise the County's full economic potential and a key part of this plan is to ensure that Essex is better connected locally, nationally and internationally. By planning strategically and recognising the connections and interdependency of different forms of infrastructure we are working to support ongoing sustainable growth.

Key to this will be:

- current work to explore ways in which powers across a whole range of services and decision making can be devolved to the most appropriate level,
- continued partnership working with Highways England at both a strategic and operational level including the adoption of a memorandum of understanding. This will include work on vital projects such as the widening of the A12 north of Chelmsford, improvements to junction 7 of the M11 and improvements to the A120, and
- a willingness to work collaboratively on cross border issues with other highways authorities. The A14 is a good example of how this collaboration across Highways England and Local Authorities can help the Department of Transport and Government realise strategic aspirations.

We are keen to build constructive relationships with both the ORR and Highways England in pursuit of these ambitions. We believe effective working between highways authorities and Highways England will be vital and we see ORR having an

important role in ensuring that these relationships are effective in contributing to wider national and local outcomes.

I trust that you find our response useful in developing what is a new role for the ORR. Should it be helpful for Essex County Council to offer any further thoughts or clarify the points made below, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rodney L Bass', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cllr Rodney L Bass CC
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation
Essex County Council

CC: Simon Amor, Highways England

Q1. Are you clear what our role will involve? Are there aspects of our role which you would like more clarity about?

Yes. We are clear about what the new role will involve and how this links to those of the DfT and Highways England. We will watch with interest as the ORR develops this role and its relationship with relevant stakeholders.

We are keen to build constructive relationships with both the ORR and Highways England. We believe effective working between highways authorities and Highways England will be vital and we see ORR having an important role in ensuring that these relationships are effective in contributing to wider national and local outcomes.

Q2. Do you agree with our strategic objectives for our highways monitoring role?

Yes. We support the strategic objectives.

It is important that Highways England as a government owned company is held to account for its performance and efficiency and that this performance is transparent in a way that enables the company to be held to account.

Q3. Are there any specific ways you would like us to engage with you beyond the industry forums already referred to in this document?

We recognise and agree that the ORR's role with respect to local roads is limited to monitoring Highways England's management of integration.

However, we believe that the interplay between the strategic road network and those managed by local authorities is vital to the continued growth and prosperity of England.

Local roads and the strategic road network are planned and resourced in different ways but provide a single indivisible network for those that use them. We believe it is important that the ORR consider engaging with both officer and elected Members with a focus on the local road network in a more structured way – possibly through the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) to ensure that this vital linkage is reflected in how Highways England is monitored. ORR could also consider the use of an annual survey to local highways authorities to supplement the views of local residents through Transport Focus and any replacement to the National Road Users Satisfaction Survey. This would enable the ORR to gain an understanding of how highways authorities are working with HE to deliver the best local solutions and to the necessary standards.

Q4. Have we identified the key areas that require monitoring? Are there particular areas of Highways England's performance and efficiency which you consider require specific focus or an alternative monitoring approach?

The broad eight areas identified in the performance specification are the correct areas for monitoring.

It is not clear from the information provided in the consultation whether the Highways England internal managing information and the identification of additional bespoke data will cover all the areas that the ORR should monitor and draw on the necessary blend of quantitative and qualitative information.

We agree that a key focus should be on cost, efficiency and delivery of objectives set out in its delivery plans. However, this needs to be positioned at a systems level – and be able to understand the interdependencies of the performance of HE and that of local highways authorities. Monitoring should factor in how well HE work in partnership with local authorities and the ramifications of not having effective partnership working arrangements in place

Monitoring should also consider how well this new company delivers on its pledge to be customer focused.

It will be important that the monitoring looks equally across the three elements of HEs role in operating, maintaining and enhancing the strategic road network.

It will be useful to monitor how (or if) the longer term funding certainty being made available to Highways England is making a difference to how they are planning and maximising value for money. We are committed at a local level to develop longer term highways funding.

Q5. We have set out initial plans for reporting on Highways England's performance and efficiency. Is there further information or analysis that you think we should produce?

We recognise that a flexible approach is being developed and that both the method and content of ORRs monitoring role will be firmed up over the first year of this new role. We welcome that regular independent reviews will take place to ensure that the ORR role is effective in holding Highways England to account.

Consideration needs to be given as to how appropriate benchmarking arrangements can be put in place as this is not clear from the consultation document. Again it will be important to look across the effectiveness of services provided by Highways England on the strategic road network and that of local highways authorities so that lessons and experiences can be shared. However, this needs to be mindful of the stark differences in funding being made available to the two tiers.

It is important that information and analysis can be disaggregated to the smallest geographical basis possible as well as for the company as a whole to enable regional / local discrepancies to be as transparent as possible.

Q6. Is there specific information relating to Highways England which is not currently in the public domain which you think should be priorities for publication?

Not at this stage, but as the role of both Highways England's and the ORR evolve it will be importantly to revisit what information is made available and when