



ORR Road Expert Panel meeting

18 September 2020, 1300 to 1615

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Agenda

1300 to 1305	Welcome and declarations of interest
1305 to 1315	Update from the highways team
1320 to 1335	Topic 1 – Review of the first year
1335 to 1425	Topic 2 – Incentivising Highways England to deliver wider environmental and social improvements
1425to 1430	Break
1430 to 1520	Topic 3 – How can ORR monitor and incentivise improvement in user satisfaction in Road Period 2
1520 to 1610	Topic 4 - Highways England’s enhancement programme – Our role in monitoring projects in "Tier 1"
1610 to 1615	AOB

Welcome and declarations of interest

All Panel members were present. Feras Alshaker, Deputy Director of Highways welcomed everyone to the panel and explained best practise for using Microsoft Teams.

Declarations of interests reported before the meeting include:

Sue Sharland – Is now an Interim NED at Vehicle Certification Agency

Update from the highways team

Feras started with a brief update on the outputs from the ORR Highways team, ORR continues to work from home, with some offices open. ORR published the Annual Assessment of Highways England's performance in July. ORR provided comments and feedback on Highways England's Strategic Business Plan and Delivery Plan. RIS2 reporting has commenced, and ORR continues to engage with Highways England and DfT on the Smart Motorway action plan.

ORRs Review of the First Year

A member of the Highways team went through the outcomes and actions ORR has taken as a result of panel meetings over the last year. Examples were given of planned changes and improvements to the running of the panel.

The panel discussed their priorities for future topics, including non-road users, innovation within Highways England and safety.

Incentivising Highways England to deliver wider environmental and social improvements

A member of the Highways team discussed the environmental and social performance indicators for Highways England.

There was discussion around the stretch of the indicator targets. The UN climate goals and UK climate commitments could be used as a starting point for future performance indicators. Baseline data was seen as important if accompanied by stronger targets. The panel agreed that Highways England should have a plan to work towards Net zero carbon emissions.

The panel felt there are opportunities for Highways England to look more long-term at strategic issues such as the growing skills gap and that contributing to community projects should be encouraged, stakeholder engagement may show that local residents value community projects. Cultural heritage, including the design of infrastructure such as bridges could form part of a future metric.

ORR could collaborate with other parties, such as DEFRA and campaign groups and may have to be more public with recommendations for RP3. A net gain in biodiversity would be the minimum expected now, especially as roadside habitats are usually untouched by people.

ORR should also mention when Highways England delivers over and above what is expected in terms of environmental performance. Creating a whole environmental package as part of improvements can get opposition to new roads on side, linking up with local spatial plans can also facilitate this. Targets on road noise and user carbon were also mentioned.

How can ORR monitor and incentivise improvement in user satisfaction in Road Period 2

A member of the Highways team introduced the panel to the current challenges to measuring user satisfaction with a pause in face to face interviewing.

The panel believe online surveys were seen as a clear solution in the short term. As well as user satisfaction, non-users can bring some insight as to why they don't use the SRN, further surveys targeting vulnerable users and local residents were also suggested.

User satisfaction is heavily linked to the number of users, so most users will be happy with emptier roads during lockdown, journey time reliability is another important factor.

If satisfaction is at 90% then there will be diminishing returns to increase that as some users won't be satisfied about things outside of HE's control.

ORR may want to consider the data broken down by protected characteristics.

Highways England's enhancement programme – Our role in monitoring projects in "Tier 1"

A member of the Highways team presented on what is the most appropriate role for ORR in monitoring Tier 1 projects.

The panel discussed how benefits realisation is important, and transparency is key. ORR should use that transparency to praise Highways England when schemes are delivered on time and on budget. If project evaluation is falling behind, then ORR could draw attention to that.

ORR needs to add something to the industry and its independence is a positive, so could push on value for money on enhancements for example.

AOB

There was further discussion about the future of the panel, with three meetings planned for next year.

Next Meeting: February 2021