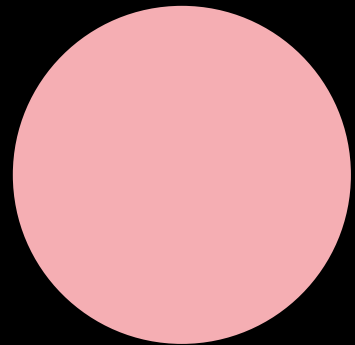
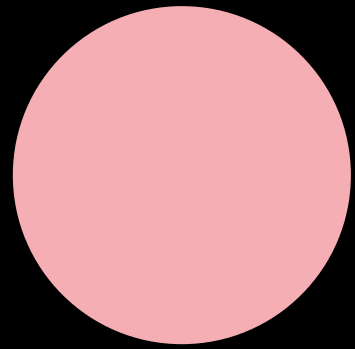

ORR
National Highways
Stakeholder Research
2025



Report

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Background and objectives

1. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) is the independent body responsible for holding National Highways to account for its operations, performance, and delivery of the Road Investment Strategy (RIS), and statutory directions and guidance issued to it by the Secretary of State for Transport (including its licence).
2. National Highways is responsible for maintaining, operating and improving the strategic road network (SRN) in England, as well as delivering the RIS and complying with its licence. If the company does not meet the requirements in the RIS and/or the requirements of statutory directions and guidance (including licence conditions), ORR can take action.
3. Engagement with stakeholders is a crucial part of National Highways' role, and essential to the organisation's ability to function effectively. Effective cooperation with stakeholder groups like local authorities, the emergency services, other transport operators and others is fundamental to the smooth running of the SRN.
4. Appropriately, an important part of National Highways' licence is sections 5.17-5.19, which require the company to engage with its stakeholders. The specific requirements on National Highways include:
 - Taking into account local needs, priorities and plans while operating the SRN.
 - Supporting local authorities in managing their own road networks.
 - Cooperating and consulting with a range of different stakeholder groups (including local authorities, devolved administrations, other transport operators, operational partners, road users and communities).
 - Doing so in a way that is open, transparent, positive, responsive and collaborative.
5. ORR commissioned Savanta, an independent market research agency, to help it understand how well National Highways is performing when it comes to stakeholder engagement.
6. This core aims of this research project are as follows:
 - Develop clear assessment criteria for National Highways' performance at stakeholder engagement.
 - Provide the evidence and assessment for National Highways' performance at stakeholder engagement.
 - Make clear, for each part of the licence conditions, how well (or poorly) National Highways is meeting that requirement, how it is (or is not) doing so, and what it needs to do in order to do so better.
 - Benchmark, where possible, National Highways against other organisations.
 - Provide recommendations to improve how ORR holds National Highways to account in order to meet its licence conditions.
 - Provide recommendations for ORR on whether conditions 5.17-5.19 are proving successful in encouraging the collaborative behaviours they are intended to, and how these can be improved if required.

7. This report presents an in-depth analysis of stakeholder perceptions and engagements with National Highways, illustrating both areas of high performance and opportunities for improvements.

Methodology

8. The method for this research includes two parts:

Quantitative online survey which ran between 31st January and 7th March 2025.

Qualitative depth interviews which ran between 3rd February and 4th April 2025.
9. Both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research were designed in collaboration with ORR and covered the following topics which are outlined in this report:
 - Familiarity with National Highways
 - Engagement with National Highways
 - Assessment against National Highways' licence conditions
 - Stakeholder improvements and recommendations for National Highways

Sample

Online Survey (Quantitative sample)

10. The sample for the online survey was supplied by National Highways. The contacts were then grouped according to:
 - Stakeholder organisation category (i.e. the main function of the organisation).
 - Stakeholder type (i.e. the main form of engagement with National Highways).
 - Kind of organisation for those who engage with National Highways in major projects.
11. In total (after checking the sample file for any invalid email addresses), 4,217 contacts were invited to participate in the online survey, out of which 425 completed the survey.
12. This makes the margin of error for the online survey +/-4.51 percentage points. This means that the actual results could differ by up to 4.51 percentage points from the values in this report. Essentially, the margin of error reflects how much the research findings might vary compared to if all 4,217 stakeholders had participated in the survey. This difference indicates how the stated percentage might be more or less than the true value.
13. A margin of error of +/-4.51 means we can draw robust conclusions from the data in this report as it wouldn't significantly change the findings.
14. The majority of stakeholders who took part in the online survey were Local Authorities and Political Bodies, involved in operations and a mix of major and non-major projects with National Highways.

Figure A. Stakeholders by category (n=425)

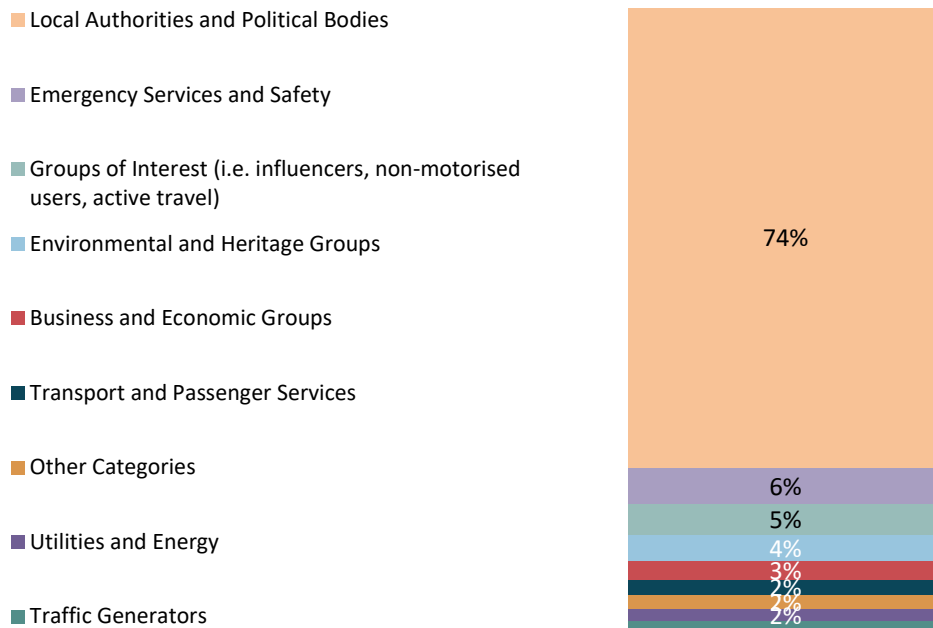
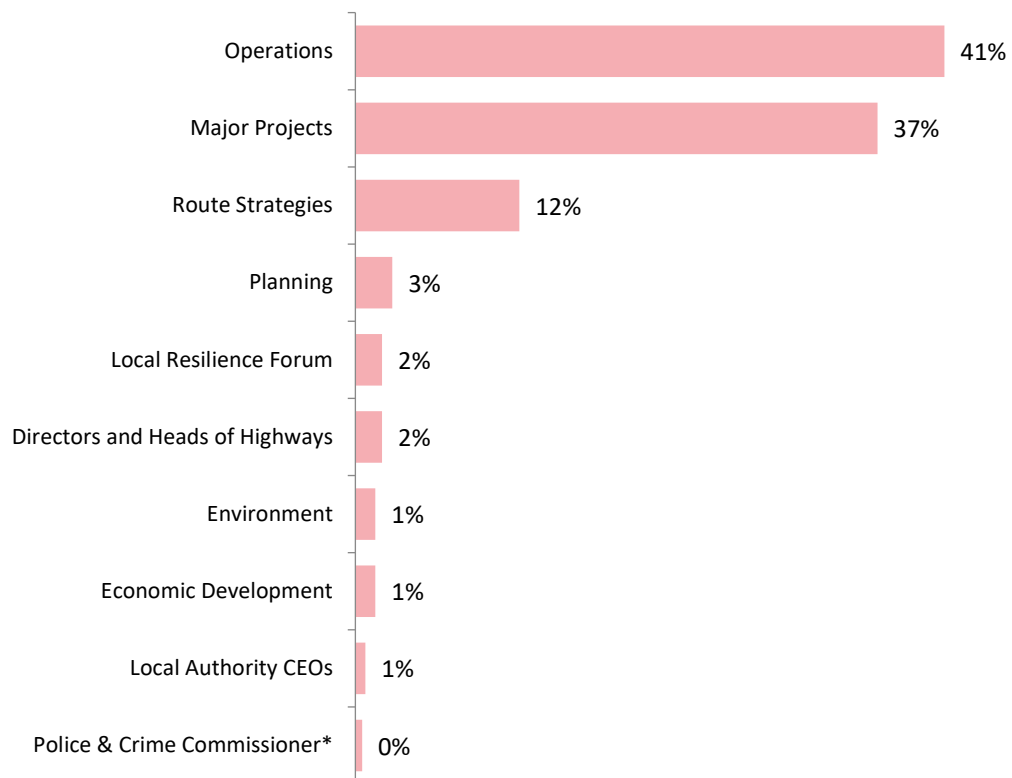
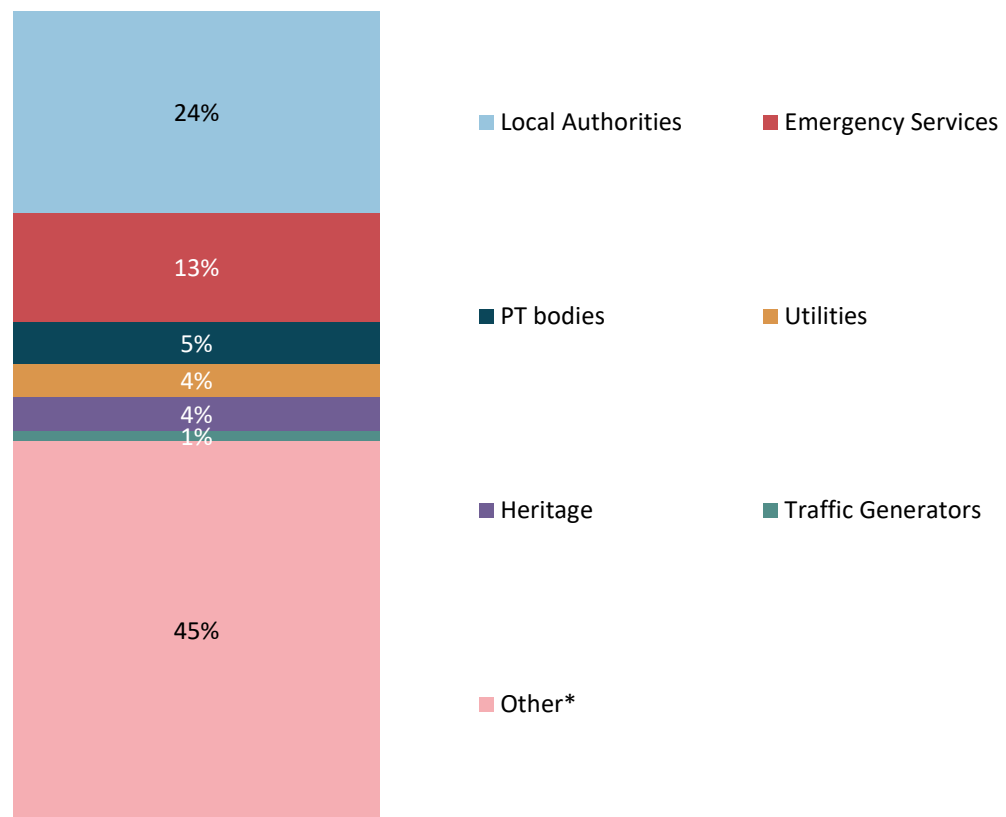


Figure B. Stakeholders by type (n=425)



*For Police & Crime Commissioner, the data present represents less than 0.5% of the sample.

Figure C. Stakeholder category among those involved in Major Projects (n=156)



*In project involvement, stakeholders classified under Other include Chamber of Commerce, Tourism bodies, Energy and Economic groups, Active Travel organisations, etc.

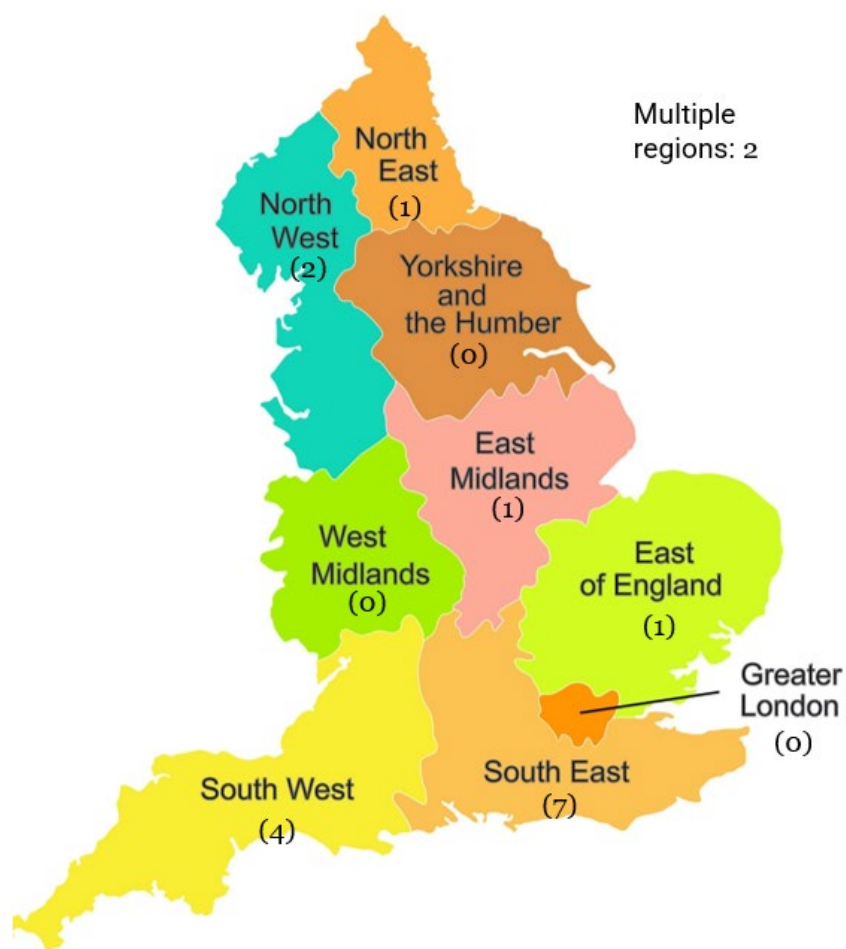
Online interviews (Qualitative sample)

15. The sample for the online interviews was chosen by ORR and contained a mix of contacts that had completed the online survey and those that were not invited to do so.
16. Savanta contacted 210 contacts to participate in the qualitative research, out of which 32 National Highways stakeholders responded to our request. Savanta sent three reminders to the contacts in the qualitative sample. Savanta has tried to complete interviews with stakeholders from all major regions in England.
17. Savanta completed in-depth interviews with 26 stakeholders from different regions across the UK and of different stakeholder types (please see the table and chart below for detailed breakdowns). The six participants that responded but did not complete an interview said they weren't available to participate.

The stakeholders participating in the qualitative research are from:

Type	N=
Local authorities	18
Sub-regional transport authority	5
Transport operator	3

Figure D: Region breakdown for stakeholders in the qualitative interviews



*Multiple regions refers to stakeholders that operate in more than one region in England.

Executive summary

Familiarity with National Highways

18. National Highways is widely recognised among stakeholders with eight in ten (80%) claiming at least a fair amount of familiarity with it as an organisation. High familiarity is as expected considering the sample was based on the company's stakeholders, since the remaining 20% of stakeholders held at least a little familiarity, with no stakeholders having no awareness of National Highways.
19. Stakeholder familiarity with National Highways is bolstered through frequent engagements, particular amongst those involved in strategic (84%) and major project (85%) focused roles. Conversely, stakeholders engaged for operational reasons exhibit lower familiarity (71%). This lower recognition can be traced back to the nature of their interactions, which are typically focused on maintenance and day-to-day management of the road network. Stakeholders who engage with National Highways for operational purposes note that these interactions are more reactive and limited than those who engage on major projects or for strategic purposes, which helps to explain their lower familiarity levels. Stakeholders engaging with National Highways on major projects or for strategic purposes mentioned strategic meetings taking place, as well as consultations that enable stakeholders to contribute to National Highways' plans, resulting in higher familiarity.

Engagement with National Highways

20. Many stakeholders rate their interactions positively, particularly those engaging frequently with National Highways. Regular updates and well-structured communications are highly valued by stakeholders.
21. However, there is a clear appetite for more proactive, face-to-face interactions, especially in strategic discussions and at senior-level. This was mentioned by a mix of stakeholders from local authorities, sub-regional authorities and transport operators, and by those holding a range of roles within their organisation in relation to the road sector. Informal, reactive engagements are viewed less favourably, posing challenges in building deeper relationships. These types of engagements are seen to limit both the potential for meaningful collaboration and the possibility of stakeholders and National Highways developing strategic plans and alignment.
22. Feedback from the qualitative interviews also reveals lower satisfaction with strategic engagements, such as long-term planning and future strategic outlooks. Strategic-level interactions – meaning engagement that focuses on long-term planning, investment decisions and infrastructure development plans – are seen as less effective due to challenges in transparency, responsiveness, and alignment of strategic priorities with local needs. Stakeholders expressed frustration over perceived bureaucracy and the rigidity of processes, which has hampered efficient communication and decision-making.
23. However, when benchmarked against other transport bodies, stakeholders rate National Highways' engagement highly (51%), coming ahead of others such as Network Rail (37%). Despite this, in the research interviews, stakeholders reflected on best practices from other organisations they work with such as the Department for Transport (DfT) and Transport for the North (TfN) who often exhibit more localised,

responsive, and collaborative engagements, which stakeholders feel National Highways could adopt to further enhance its engagement efforts.

Assessment against the licence conditions

24. Based on the evidence gathered in the research, from National Highways stakeholders involved in a variety of roles and from various organisations, on balance our judgement is that National Highways generally meets its licence conditions, as it is perceived as collaborative and professional. However, based on the feedback provided from National Highways' stakeholders, there exists room for improvement in transparency and responsiveness.
- **Local needs:** there is general agreement that National Highways supports local priorities to some extent, but there is a notable proportion that believe it to be only to a small extent (24%) or not at all (8%). Major project stakeholders report higher satisfaction due to comprehensive consultations and substantial investments addressing local priorities.
 - **Engagement:** stakeholders are seeking a more consistent approach from National Highways' engagements. Key challenges identified by stakeholders include siloed communications within National Highways, and interactions with subcontractors, which often lead to a perception of inefficiencies and disjointed communication.
 - **Cooperation:** is generally seen as positive, with National Highways making efforts to foster collaborative relationships. However, stakeholders highlight areas where they would like to see improvement to ensure alignment of strategic cooperation with national and local needs.
 - **Qualities exhibited by National Highways:** collaboration is viewed as the most critical attribute for National Highways in stakeholder engagement. While stakeholders recognise the company as professional and collaborative, stakeholders said that there is room for improvement in transparency and proactive engagements. Strengthening these qualities would enhance partnership efforts and contribute to ensuring that stakeholder needs are better met.

Conclusion

25. Overall, stakeholders appreciate the challenging role National Highways has, and praise its efforts to engage with their various stakeholders in a professional and polite manner. Stakeholders have reported examples and instances of positive interactions where National Highways was collaborative, helpful and transparent. However, this has not always been consistently the case. This report contains conclusions and recommendations suggesting ways in which ORR could explore with National Highways how it can leverage positive practices, as outlined by stakeholders, and improve consistency in stakeholder engagements to ensure National Highways provides comprehensive stakeholder support. We have made these recommendations mindful of ORR's ask that we consider its statutory duties to act in a way that is transparent, accountable, proportionate and consistent, and to target action only at cases where it is needed

Improvements and recommendations

26. Overall, our findings show that stakeholders perceive National Highways' engagement with them as satisfactory. However, stakeholders also offer insights into areas where ORR might wish to work with National Highways to improve the company's future engagement, and stakeholders' perceptions. The recommendations below are based on this feedback from stakeholders.

Early and Meaningful Engagement

27. Stakeholders demonstrate high familiarity with National Highways, particularly among those involved in strategic and major project roles, where regular strategic meetings and consultations are common. While National Highways currently engages stakeholders through strategic meetings that allow for input on major projects, stakeholders indicate that engagement in scheme development often occurs too late for meaningful influence.
28. To further enhance this engagement, **it is recommended that ORR considers exploring with National Highways whether its approach to engaging stakeholders in scheme development provides meaningful insight, and supports early engagement that could better assist local growth and development priorities.** By emphasising early involvement, stakeholders can better align their priorities and influence projects constructively from the outset, preventing misunderstandings and fostering consensus with local authorities.
29. Feedback suggests that earlier engagement would improve transparency and responsiveness, addressing challenges associated with stakeholder contributions occurring after key decisions are made, thereby enabling deeper relationships and strategic alignment. It could have the additional benefit of providing insights from those closest to the issues on how best National Highways' schemes and plans can support local growth and development.

Enhancing Collaboration and Communication Structures

30. Stakeholders voiced the need for more transparent sharing of evidence, such as data supporting investment decisions and proposals outlining future projects. They also highlighted the need for clearer explanations regarding delays or cancellations, as these are crucial for aligning expectations and plans.
31. Currently, National Highways typically employs a communication structure that includes periodic updates and the distribution of reports to stakeholders. These updates, often shared through email communications or during scheduled meetings, may not delve deeply into specifics, leaving stakeholders with broad overviews rather than the comprehensive insights needed for effective planning and decision-making. This has led to perceived ambiguity. The infrequent nature of these updates also presents challenges. There is also a desire for reliable and clear communication protocols, including setting specific timelines for updates, defining contact points for various issues, and ensuring that information is communicated transparently and predictably.

32. **We recommend ORR discusses with National Highways how it optimises its communications to ensure they are sufficiently detailed and of a frequency to keep stakeholders well-informed and engaged, and to support them in their decision making. The company's communications should be efficient and responsive whilst maintaining a professional tone of voice that will ultimately strengthen stakeholder interactions and facilitate the alignment of strategic priorities with local needs.**
33. It is important that National Highways has the right collaboration and communication structures to minimise gaps in communication and engagement. At present, stakeholders observe that planning processes can seem inconsistent across different projects, with variability arises due to differing project scales, regional needs, or departmental involvement. This can lead to confusion and can hinder stakeholders' ability to manage involvement effectively. **National Highways has mature planning processes and frameworks for project development, particularly for major enhancement projects. We recommend that ORR work with the company to ensure that these encompass appropriate requirements to ensure that stakeholders are engaged early and are regularly informed. This could help to support joined up decision making on local growth and priorities.**
34. Stakeholders report that perceived adherence to bureaucratic protocols hampers collaborative strategic engagement, particularly when flexibility is required to address local priorities or unanticipated challenges. For example, some told us that pre-COVID senior-level meetings (any i.e. online, in-person, etc.) had not been reinstated. These would provide regular touchpoints for addressing strategic concerns, fostering better relationships and perceptions. **We recommend that ORR seeks assurance from National Highways that its approach to senior-level stakeholder meetings supports a consistent and strategic dialogue between the company and its stakeholders to build and sustain strong relationships and support one another's strategic goals.**

Knowledge Sharing and Support

35. Stakeholders raised the challenge of identifying the right points of contact for different issues or projects. **We recommend that ORR discusses with National Highways how best to communicate its organisational structure with stakeholders (as far as it is relevant), and more importantly, how it signposts appropriate points of contact to its stakeholders. This would help to minimise administrative and bureaucratic burdens for those stakeholders and streamline channels of communication.**
36. While National Highways conducts some proactive outreach and updates, stakeholders report gaps in communication, particularly in routine operational updates and during changes in project status. This can leave stakeholders feeling disconnected or unaware of developments unless they actively seek information themselves. **We recommend that ORR discuss with National Highways its proactive outreach efforts and how it is assured that all stakeholders receive timely updates without needing to initiate contact. A single, possibly automated process could efficiently help minimise discrepancies.**
37. Stakeholders expressed concerns over perceived siloed communications that occur when different teams at National Highways appear to be not aligned in sharing

information. This can result in stakeholders having a fragmented understanding of projects and decisions impacting overall efficiency and collaboration. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of integrated communications that reflect a unified approach across the organisation to support local decision making. **We recommend that ORR discusses with National Highways how it effectively minimises internal silos and ensures consistent communications from the company to stakeholders, no matter the internal team or directorate. This would support internal efficiency and ensure that external communications are seamless and comprehensive.**

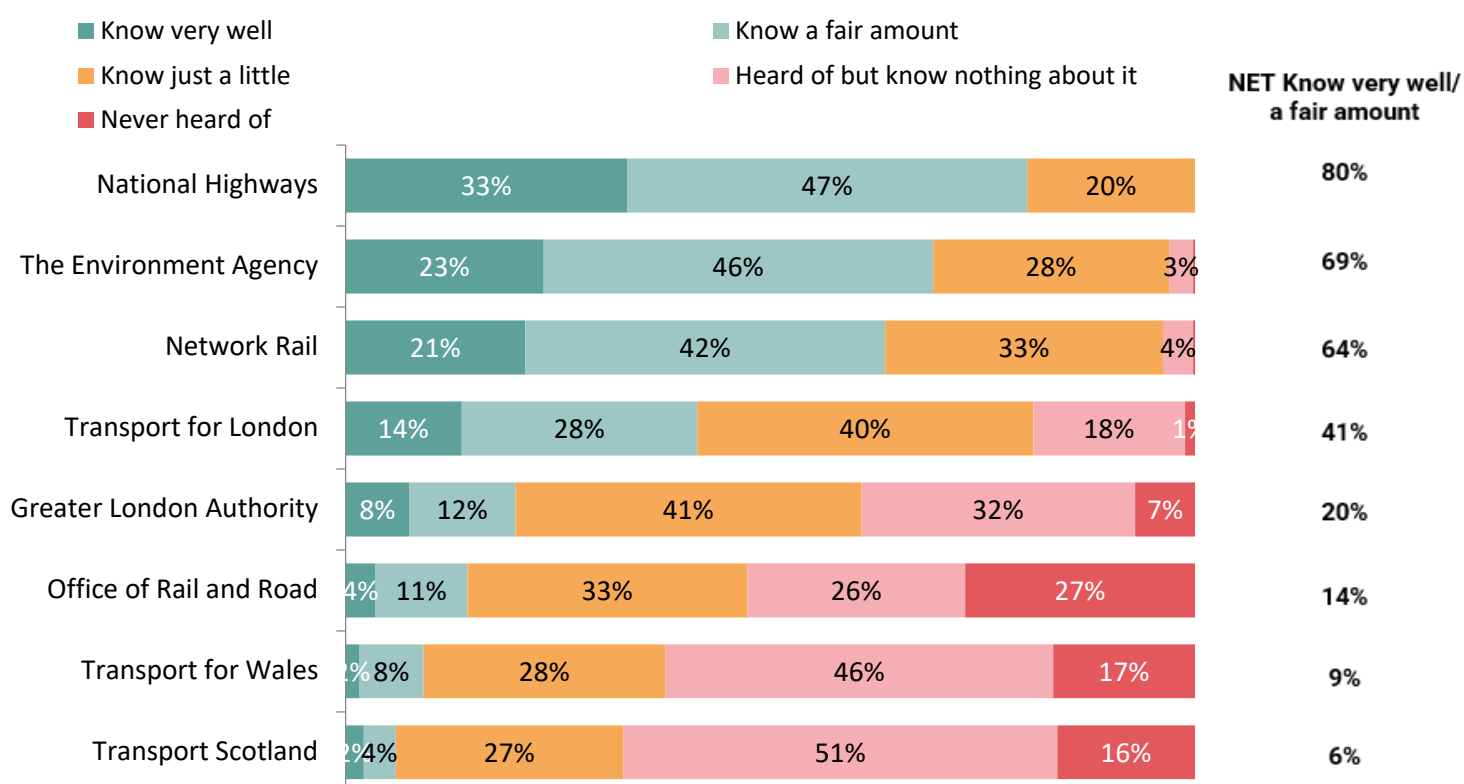
38. These measures are designed to address stakeholder needs for smoother cooperation and clearer communication, ultimately enhancing the collaborative relationship between National Highways and its stakeholders by integrating consistent, efficient, and transparent communication practices. This in turn will support the agenda for growth of the company and its stakeholders, supporting local communities and the strategic road network, and minimising bureaucracy and the burden that can come with it.

Research findings in detail

Familiarity with National Highways

39. Overall, stakeholder familiarity in both the survey and interviews is high, with the majority aware of the specific roles and functions of National Highways. Whilst stakeholders demonstrate familiarity with the roles and responsibilities of National Highways, they face challenges in the clarity of its organisational structure.
40. Eight in ten (80%) of National Highways' stakeholders claim to know at least a fair amount about National Highways as an organisation.

Figure E. Q2. Which of the following best describes how well you know each of the following organisations? Base: All respondents (n=425)



Note: NET: Know very well / a fair amount, combines two answer options which are 'Know very well' and 'Know a fair amount'

41. This positions National Highways as the most well-known organisation among its stakeholders compared to other similar bodies. These bodies were chosen because their roles either at a national or sub-regional level relate to the transport sector. This is as expected considering the sample for this research is based on National Highways' stakeholders. National Highways' stakeholders are highly familiar with other organisations such as the Environment Agency (69%) and Network Rail (64%), with familiarity with ORR being notably lower at just 14%.
42. Similar to the quantitative results, stakeholders in the qualitative interviews had a moderate to high level of familiarity with National Highways. Many stakeholders were able to identify key roles and responsibilities of National Highways, such as maintaining and improving the strategic road network, and overseeing major projects. They acknowledged the value of National Highways in facilitating transportation and contributing to the economic vitality for example, local businesses, tourism, and logistics for many regions.

“National Highways are one of our key stakeholders. They're very much involved. They come along to our board meetings, which take place quarterly, and they provide regular updates”

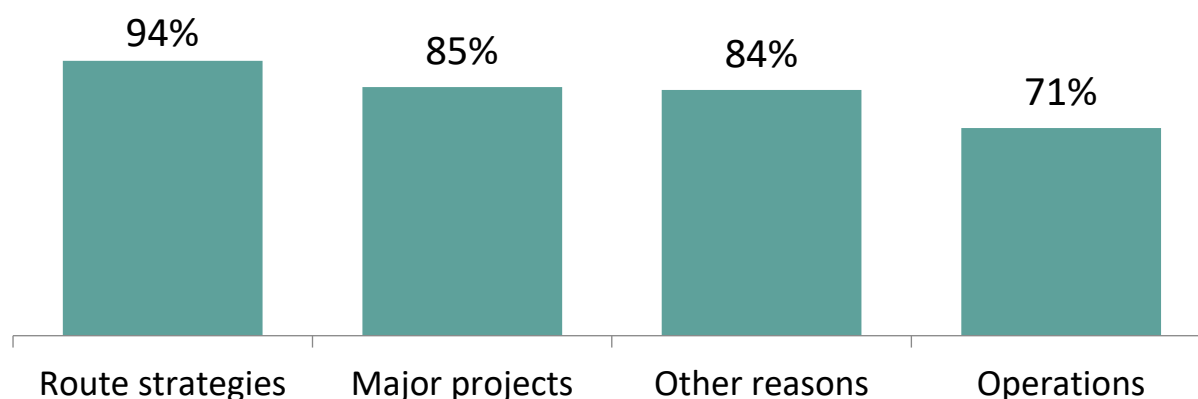
Sub-regional transport authority

“It's critical and I think they were one of the original members of the Board. Them and Network Rail as the 2 major infrastructure providers outside of local authorities in [our remit]. They're part of the jigsaw. Without the strategic road network, the region doesn't work. They have to be on it, it is so critical.”

Sub-regional transport authority

Figure F. Q2. Which of the following best describes how well you know each of the following organisations? (Showing stakeholders that know National Highways ‘NET: At least a fair amount’ split by stakeholder type)

Base: All respondents (n=425), Major projects (n=156), Operations (n=176), Route strategies (n=49), Other reasons (n=44).



43. However, there is variation in knowledge of National Highways depending on stakeholder type. Stakeholders involved in route strategies (94%), major projects (85%), and 'other reasons'* (84%) show the highest levels of knowledge about National Highways, a trend echoed in the qualitative interviews. Some stakeholders, such as those involved in ongoing projects and those that have strong strategic engagements with National Highways, have well-established contacts and understand who to reach out to for specific issues. This enhanced familiarity could be attributed to the more in-depth and frequent interactions required by their roles.
44. Major projects and route strategy engagements are often large-scale initiatives and require long-term and complex planning therefore coordination and engagement with stakeholders is necessary for project / strategy success. As is discussed in the engagement section of this report, these types of stakeholders are more likely to engage with National Highways due to the scope of their work, which explains the higher levels of familiarity.

**Note: The "other reason" stakeholder type encompasses Directors and Heads of Highways, Economic Development, Environment, Local Authority CEOs, Local Resilience Forums, Planning, and Police Crime Commissioners.*

45. Conversely, stakeholders dealing with National Highways for operational reasons exhibit less familiarity (71%), possibly due to the specific nature of their interactions. This was also seen in the qualitative interviews where stakeholders, such as local authorities and those who engage with National Highways for operational reasons, found the organisational structure of National Highways difficult to navigate. Operational reasons for engaging with National Highways link to maintenance, minor upgrades and day to day management of the road network. Stakeholders engaging with National Highways for operational reasons report that interactions are more limited and National Highways is more reactive than proactive in their handling of operational jobs. This more limited engagement leads to lower levels of familiarity. These more limited and reactive engagements meant stakeholders experienced delayed responses and therefore increased operational disruption, rather than having potential issues being pre-emptively dealt with.

"I know our key contacts for strategic engagement, but when it comes to day-to-day operational queries, it's sometimes challenging to find the right person to speak to."

Local authority

"We really need that proactive engagement with operational people at National Highways that can help support and deliver what we're trying to do, which is day-to-day maintenance of the network and deliver new highways projects. National Highways always rely on us going and seeking them out, and that's where we have a problem because we don't know where to go to in the organisation."

Local authority

46. The complexity of National Highways' organisational structure was frequently mentioned as a barrier to efficient communication and problem resolution. This has led to delays and inefficiencies in addressing stakeholder needs such as disrupting project timelines and delaying important communications. Whilst the majority of

stakeholders are aware of National Highways' role generally, there is limited understanding of the organisation's day to day functions which is impacting effective relationships. Stakeholders have a limited understanding of who to go to at National Highways when problems arise due to either not knowing who is responsible for what within National Highways, or a lack of avenues to be able to contact people at National Highways. The latter is either due to not having a dedicated contact person at National Highways, or having to send queries via generic email inboxes.

"There's been a lot of back-and-forth trying to get issues resolved because we didn't know the correct point of contact. It feels like we're getting bounced around, which delays the resolution of important matters"

Local authority

"The Department for Transport is better in their engagements, and that's just mainly because they publish their organisational chart. I know how to get hold of someone in DfT. I can find my way around DfT and I can't find my way around National Highways."

Sub-regional transport authority

47. A theme emerging from the stakeholders' feedback is that National Highways should work towards becoming more transparent about its organisational structure. This could be addressed, stakeholders suggest, by setting up communication channels or publishing organisational charts so stakeholders are aware of who they need to contact for what purpose.

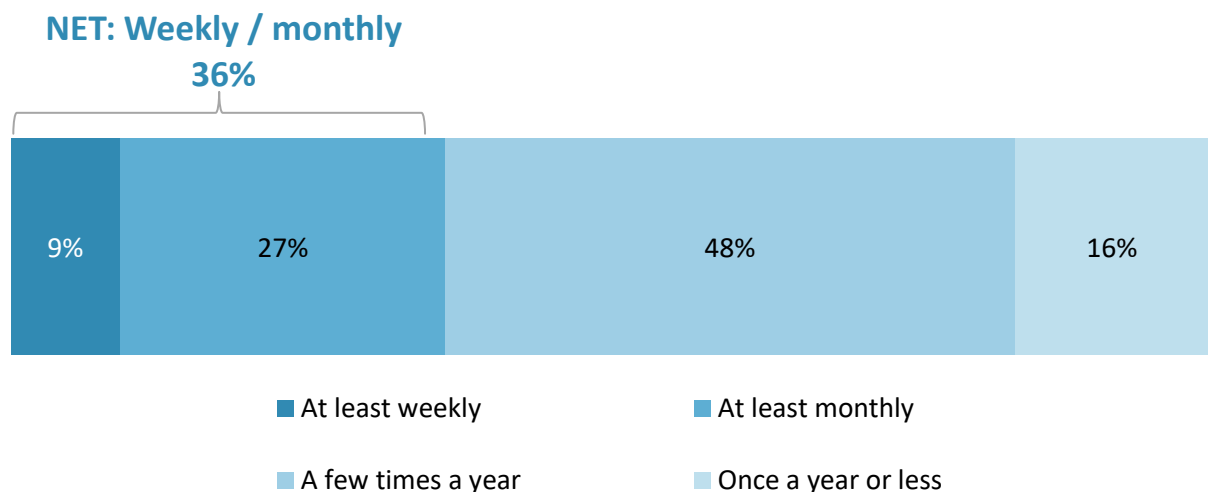
Engagement with National Highways

48. Stakeholder engagement with National Highways varies, with frequent interactions for stakeholders working on major projects with National Highways and less frequent communication for operational tasks. Stakeholders working on major projects report they have more frequent engagements with National Highways due to ongoing infrastructure projects and these active projects require the need for coordination on traffic management and project planning with National Highways. In terms of operational engagements, stakeholders express a desire for regular updates and clear contact points at National Highway that will enable more frequent and more in-depth communication.
49. However, overall, stakeholders rate National Highways' engagements positively, especially for proactive communication and professionalism, but highlight areas for improvement in responsiveness and reducing bureaucratic hurdles. National Highways performs better than Network Rail but could benefit from adopting best practices from other transport bodies to further enhance engagement. For example, from the Department for Transport (DfT) and Transport for the North (TfN) where stakeholders report they receive more localised, responsive, and collaborative engagement.

Frequency of engagements with National Highways

50. In terms of engagement frequency, around half (48%) of National Highways' stakeholders engage with the organisation a few times a year. A third (36%) of stakeholders are engaging more frequently, at least monthly or weekly.

Figure G. Q3. How frequently, if at all, do you engage with National Highways?
Base: All respondents (n=425)



Note: NET: Weekly / monthly combines two answer options, 'At least weekly' and 'At least monthly'

51. Stakeholders involved in major projects (52%), route strategies (45%), and other strategic reasons (36%) are most likely to be engaging with National Highways on a monthly or weekly basis, significantly more than those engaging at an operational level (20%).
52. This higher frequency of engagement among project and strategic focused stakeholders is due to the inherent complexity and collaborative nature of these projects. These initiatives often require detailed planning, coordination, and regular updates to ensure alignment among all parties involved. Stakeholders expect this level of engagement when working on projects as they often refer to their engagements with National Highways as ‘critical’ to the success of these projects. They also need National Highways’ support in securing funding and advocating for improvements on the strategic road network. However, some stakeholders have noted that they would like greater collaboration when major works take place, as they report short notice periods are given. This in turn means local areas have limited time to prepare. Stakeholders have also reported that National Highways’ approach can come across as a ‘tick-box’ exercise, particularly for consultations and at a strategic planning level.
53. On the other hand, stakeholders who engage more with National Highways for operational reasons typically focus on routine, day-to-day activities that require less interaction with National Highways, resulting in reduced contact compared to those involved in larger-scale, strategic projects. For some stakeholders, this level of engagement is deemed appropriate due to the nature of these tasks ‘ticking along’, with engagement happening as and when needed. However, these stakeholders also report how engagement with National Highways operationally is critical due to the interconnectedness of local networks with National Highways’ networks.

"Our day-to-day network management is hugely influenced around coordinating with National Highways and, if there's problems on any of their network, our network feels it immediately."

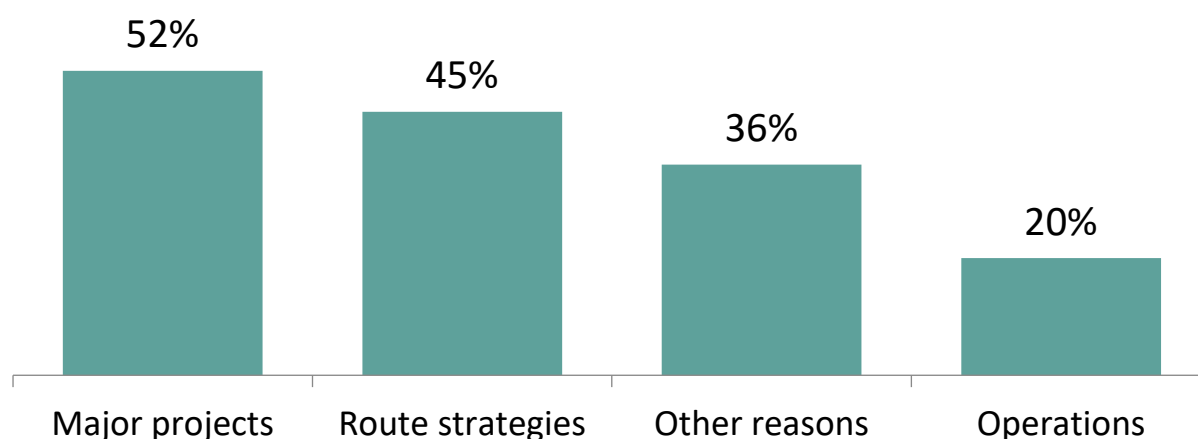
Local authority

"Day-to-day, I could live with it because day-to-day, the world carries on, the world keeps spinning, everything else, kind of thing. The issue is it's more at the strategic level. It's more at the strategic bigger picture long-term stuff where engagement is really important because that's how we're going to achieve the long-term change."

Local authority

Figure H. Q3. How frequently, if at all, do you engage with National Highways? (Showing stakeholders who engage with National Highways NET: Weekly / monthly, split by stakeholder type)

Base: All respondents (n=425), Major projects (n=156), Operations (n=176), Route strategies (n=49), Other reasons (n=44).



**Note: The "other reason" stakeholder type encompasses Directors and Heads of Highways, Economic Development, Environment, Local Authority CEOs, Local Resilience Forums, Planning, and Police Crime Commissioners.*

54. Different levels of engagement were reflected in the interviews, where stakeholders reported they have quarterly, monthly and project specific calls and updates. Stakeholders spoke of a variety of engagement frequency with National Highways, ranging from regular briefings and strategic meetings to more sporadic and ad-hoc communications. Stakeholders engaged in major projects and investment plans benefit from structured interactions with National Highways, with National Highways setting up consultations or providing stakeholders with main points of contacts. These efforts from National Highways are what stakeholders expect, since the nature of these engagements require more structure. These engagements are often focused on ongoing projects, strategic discussions, and updates on significant developments. Some local authorities benefit from regular engagements such as daily interactions via email or over the phone and weekly or bi-weekly direct meetings with National Highways, specifically citing the interconnected nature of their road networks with National Highways' networks.

"We have regular briefings with National Highways, where we talk about various projects and various developments. We have that dialogue and regular contact throughout projects and developments and National Highways at times have sat on various project boards, not only as a consultee, but, as a key partner."

Local authority

55. For some other stakeholders, such as those who engage with National Highways for operational reasons or those from smaller local authorities, engagements with National Highways are less frequent and more informal, for example phone calls or emails rather than scheduled meetings. These interactions typically occur in response to specific issues. The most common form of engagements stakeholders receive are via email and phone calls. While convenient and useful, stakeholders have identified that these methods sometimes lack the depth needed for more complex discussions.

56. Stakeholders emphasise the importance of having regular meetings and contact with National Highways in order to carry out their roles and expressed a clear preference for more frequent and structured engagements with National Highways. They also highlight the value of face-to-face meetings, especially for strategic discussions and project planning. In-person engagements are seen as more effective for building relationships and ensuring a comprehensive understanding of local issues. Whilst stakeholders understood busy schedules could be a barrier to face-to-face meetings, they noted the value in clearer communication, and the ability to have more effective discussions around complex issues.

“Our preference for these meetings is in-person. Just because of the level of seniority involved. We've got heads of service and directors and assistant directors going along to these meetings. So, we just feel it's best to have those in-person because also, what we're keen to do is build up the relationships and I find that easier to do if we've got people in a room.”

Combined authority

57. Stakeholders also expressed interest in having more engagements with senior-level personnel within National Highways for strategic discussions, as well as having designated contacts for operational issues. This dual-level engagement ensures that both strategic and day-to-day concerns are addressed effectively.

“A senior level catch up on what's going on, what's in the pipeline, growth plans for the [our remit], things that can be mutually helpful, would be quite good. I certainly feel like I probably lack that senior contact at National Highways that I could reach out to, you know, if I need to escalate something or if we had a strategic level question, I'm not 100% sure where I would go.”

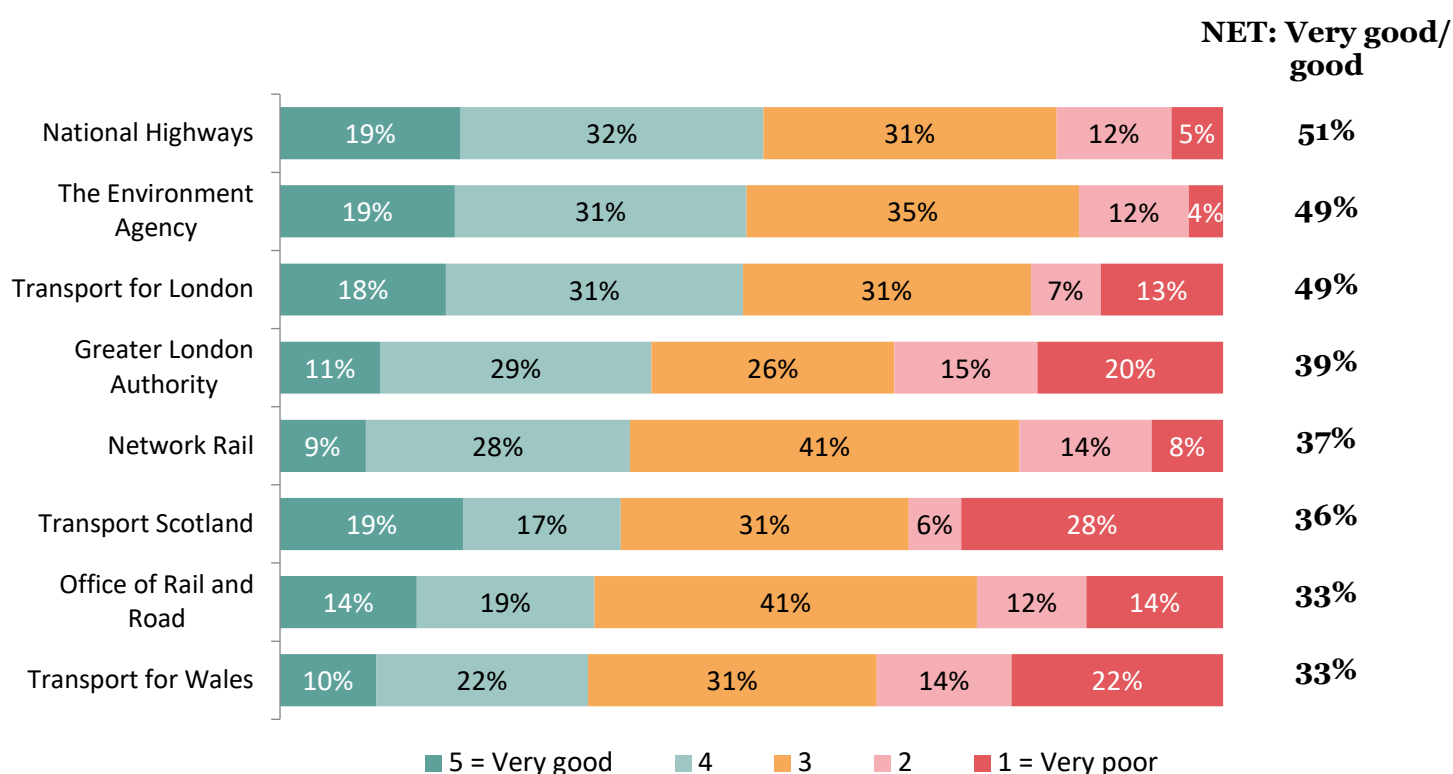
Transport operator

Stakeholder ratings of National Highways engagements

58. Stakeholders were asked to rate their interactions with various organisations they engaged with. National Highways received the highest ratings, with 51% of stakeholders indicating that their interactions were either 'very good' or 'good'. This rating significantly surpasses those given to other organisations such as Network Rail, which had 37% of stakeholders rating their interactions as 'good', and ORR, which had 33%.

Figure I. Q4. How would you rate your interactions with, engagement with and overall experience of each of the following in the last 12 months?

Base: All respondents aware of each organisations excluding 'Don't Know' : National Highways (n = 402); Transport for London (n = 108); Transport Scotland (n = 36); Transport for Wales (n = 49); Network Rail (n = 264); The Environment Agency (n = 275); Greater London Authority (n = 66); Office of Rail and Road (n = 69)



Note: NET: Very good / good combines two answer options, 'Very good' and 'Good'
Note: Only stakeholders who were aware of the listed organisations were asked to score their engagements with them.

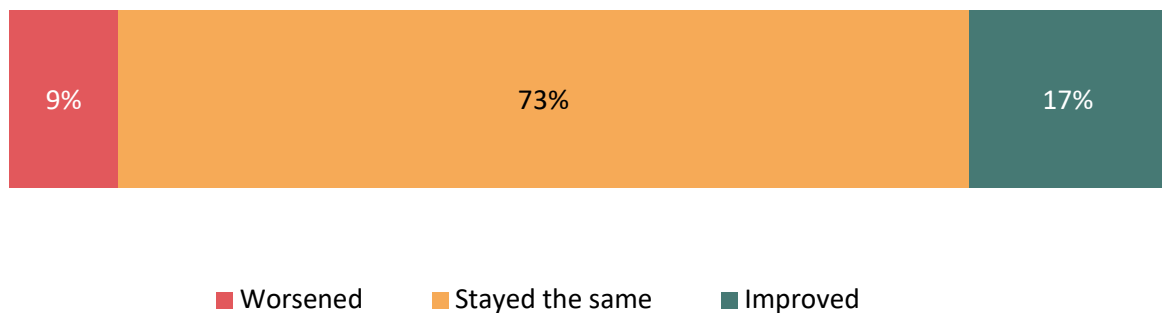
59. Among stakeholders who engage with National Highways on a more frequent basis, such as weekly or monthly, 70% provided a 'good' rating. This suggests that more regular interactions may contribute to a closer relationship and higher satisfaction. However, those stakeholders who interact with National Highways for operational reasons are significantly more likely to provide a 'Poor' rating for National Highways (22%) compared to major projects stakeholders (13%). In the interviews, stakeholders reported that operational engagements were often reactive rather than proactive, and lacked structured engagement or dedicated National Highways contacts which major project engagements benefit from.
60. This lower rating is in part a result of their lower frequency of engagement since those who only engage with National Highways yearly or a few times per year, are significantly less likely to provide National Highways with a 'Good' rating (40%) compared to those who engage more regularly, either monthly or weekly (69%). Therefore, lower frequency of engagement with National Highways looks to be hindering strong relationships and impacting engagement scores. In the interviews, stakeholders reported that they would like to receive more regular engagement from National Highways, particularly in terms of strategic planning and discussions.
61. National Highways will not be able to engage more frequently with all stakeholders due to time and resource constraints. However, resources could be used most effectively by focusing on annual strategic planning and outlook meetings. Based on stakeholder feedback, these engagements are what stakeholders would find most valuable.
62. Despite National Highways being the highest rated organisation, there remains room for improvement and an opportunity to enhance interactions, as 31% of stakeholders

provided a neutral rating. This neutrality stems from a variety of reasons, such as lack of significant positive or negative experiences or limited engagement that does not leave a strong impression.

63. National Highways has maintained its performance in interactions and engagements for the majority of stakeholders in the past 12 months (73%). Additionally, one in six stakeholders feel that interactions and engagement with National Highways improved over the last year, while just a small proportion feel interactions have worsened.

Figure J. Q15. Overall, would you say that National Highways' interactions and engagement with you have improved, worsened, or stayed about the same, compared to 12 months ago?

Base: All respondents (n=425)



64. Similar to overall rating of engagements, frequency of engagements has an influence of whether stakeholders feel National Highways' engagements have changed in the past year. Stakeholders who have less frequent engagement (yearly/ a few times per year) (78%) with National Highways are significantly more likely to say the interactions stayed the same compared to those who had frequent (monthly/weekly) (65%) engagement with National Highways. The latter group was more likely to say that interaction improved (25%) compared to the former group (13%).
65. Overall, while National Highways performs strongly, the mixed views expressed by stakeholders indicate that there is potential for enhancing their engagement and interactions further. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

National Highways engagements – positive aspects

66. Respondents in the online survey were then asked to explain why they gave National Highways that score.
67. The top scores were mostly tied to specific positive interactions had with National Highways staff or particular projects. Stakeholders who provided high ratings for National Highways mentioned their professionalism, their collaborative approach and effective communication.
68. They also appreciate the regular – such as weekly or bi-weekly meetings or updates – and proactive communication provided by the organisation. Regular meetings and updates have been cited as key reasons for positive ratings. This includes frequent updates, timely responses to queries, and ongoing meetings which help stakeholders stay informed and involved.

“National Highways engage with us during incidents and major projects. They provide meetings to discuss things, and we are able to put our views across.”

Local Authority

“Monthly engagement meetings with NH Representatives ensure we are aligned on the project progress and next steps.”

Local Authority

“I attend regular online meetings around a specific project, as well as one where they have a regular contribution to [a sub-national transport body’s] regular meetings. Their presentations are well delivered, accessible and open.”

Local Authority

69. A consistent theme among highly rated feedback is the professional and helpful manner of National Highways' staff. Stakeholders appreciate the knowledge, responsiveness, and courteous behaviour exhibited by National Highways employees. This professional approach has helped to foster an environment of respect and efficiency, significantly enhancing the stakeholder experience.

“The National Highways Teams we deal with are very polite, professional and helpful. they respond in a timely manner to our emails/enquiries and keep us informed of all the closures/works that will impact our business.”

Utilities and energy

“I have found the team at National Highways to be very proactive and willing to listen and address any concerns which I have raised when we have been working on their National Infrastructure Projects.”

Utilities and energy

“When I contacted National Highways with a query, they responded quickly and courteously.”

Local Authority

National Highways engagements – areas for development

70. However, stakeholders who have had less positive experiences often cited slow response times and bureaucratic hurdles as significant pain points. When stakeholders mentioned bureaucratic procedures they referenced long approval processes in

decision-making and rigid procedures without flexibility to adapt to local needs or conditions. These bureaucratic hurdles also include delays in communication and procedural inefficiencies which have caused frustration among stakeholders, who feel their concerns are not adequately prioritised. Several stakeholders mentioned that they viewed the National Highways organisation to be siloed, which has hampered effective communication with them.

71. Some stakeholders mentioned National Highways' use of subcontractors, which can cause further complications by making roles and responsibilities – and points of escalation – unclear. Stakeholders also mentioned their concerns over the turnover of subcontractors which prevents strong relationships from developing, and can also cause a lack of consistency in responsiveness or understanding of local issues which can cause difficulties in their engagements.

“It’s hard to find the people or team you need. They also use a lot of subcontractors who defer issues between National Highways and others. We try and share best practice to reduce conflict, cost and time, but this is very challenging. You have to repeatedly chase.”

Environmental and heritage group

“National Highways tend to be bureaucracy driven and seem to want to put blockers in the way of getting things done. I have been trying to install a single post sign on their network in [our region] for nearly 2 years and every time I think I have made progress something else is brought up to stall the project.”

Local Authority

“They are very bureaucratic and do not listen to advice on how to communicate with the local community. They are very process driven and very unadaptable. Making it very frustrating to work with them. I find the officers as helpful as they can be with the rules they work within.”

Local Authority

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72. Several stakeholders also noted a tendency for National Highways to focus on technical details without adequately addressing broader strategic issues. This narrow focus can lead to dissatisfaction among stakeholders who feel that their holistic concerns, particularly about long-term planning and community impact, are not fully considered by National Highways. Without getting local or stakeholder input on broader strategic issues, stakeholders report that there will be inefficiencies in investment planning which can cause further impacts such as costs and delays. By involving local authorities and stakeholders in strategic planning, stakeholders believe that this will turn their relationship into more of a collaborative partnership.

“There has been quite a lot of turn-over in staffing which has made it difficult to establish and develop relationships. Due to the constraints National Highways’ staff are working under, the interactions haven’t

always felt like collaborative partnership working, where we jointly work to solve the strategic network challenges we face.”

Local Authority

“Ignoring of emails. Limited interest in working with us. Focussed on the operation of highway network and limited interest in the strategic issues.”

Local Authority

“Very difficult to get hold of decision makers about our strategic planning.”

Local Authority

“We need longer term certainty such as a 10-year indication of the funding for investment in transport. Without that, you risk this stop, start, inefficient approach for planning investment. If you haven't got that long-term certainty, you've got a lot of abortive work which can cost millions of pounds, which is wasted if it's not taken forward.”

Sub-regional transport authority

73. Another recurrent issue highlighted by stakeholders is an apparent lack of coordination and internal communication within National Highways. This disjunction results in confusion and inefficiencies for stakeholders as they struggle to identify the correct contacts or navigate through various departments to get their issues resolved. There were also examples of inconsistencies between teams within National Highways and also that subcontractors and consultants being involved in National Highways has led to varied quality of communication. Stakeholders report that the quality of communication varies as a result of the high turnover amongst subcontractors, preventing them from developing long-term relationships. Additionally, stakeholders report that different contractors they've dealt with have differing levels of responsiveness and different approaches to understanding local priorities and needs, with some contractors making limited efforts to try to understand stakeholder needs.

“It is difficult to know who to contact about a specific issue. Also, I have no idea if I'm speaking to an actual member of staff, or a consultant employed by them.”

Local Authority

“There appears to be no internal communication between the National Highways response teams, planning teams and maintenance teams, all seem to expect you to tell them about an event or incident separately, rather than the teams communicating internally in National Highways. Especially frustrating when one team is on planning meetings for one of the largest events in the country and they fail to tell their maintenance team not to commission road works on the main route to the event.”

Emergency services and safety

“They are often very siloed, and one department won't have any idea what another department does or is doing. They are very wary of acknowledging any responsibility.”

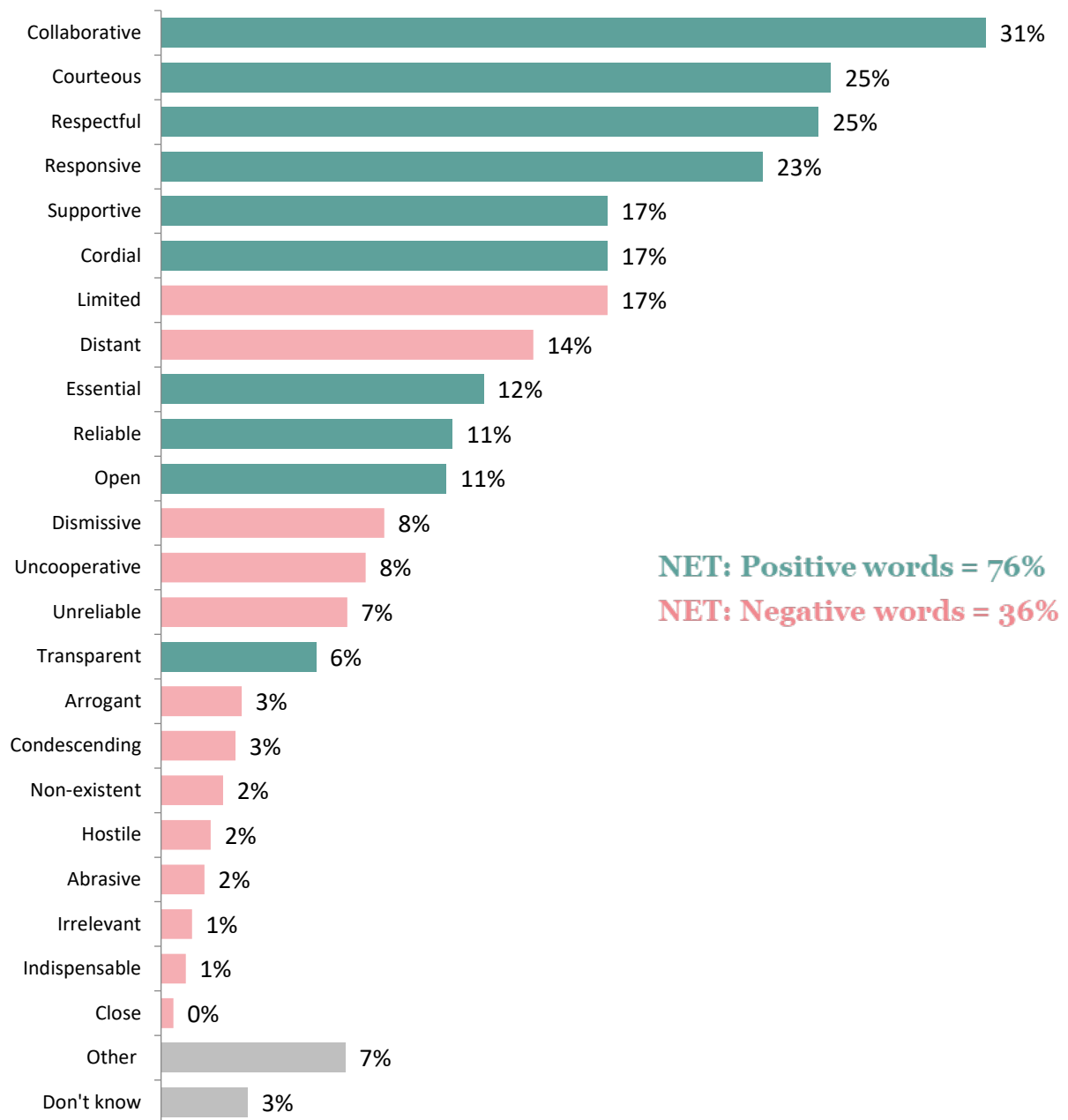
Emergency services and safety

74. Whilst there have been some positive mentions and ratings of engagements, there are some clear areas of improvement particularly around consistency and response times. Addressing these areas of concern will help National Highways increase stakeholder satisfaction which in turn will see engagement scores rise, particularly shifting those neutral scores into positive ones. Improvements to engagement, as outlined by stakeholders, will lead to more robust collaboration, facilitate smoother project execution, and allow National Highways to align better with stakeholder needs. This, in turn, will improve project and task outcomes, benefitting both National Highways and the local authorities and organisations it works with.

Stakeholder descriptions of National Highways communication

75. Beyond an overall rating of National Highways engagement, stakeholders were also asked to select descriptive words they most associate with communications received from National Highways. Over three-quarters of respondents characterised National Highways' communication in positive terms. The most frequently cited descriptor was 'collaborative', used by 31% of stakeholders.
76. Although fewer stakeholders expressed negative views, approximately one-third described their interactions negatively. The most commonly noted negative descriptors were 'limited' and 'distant'.
77. Additionally, similar to overall rating of engagements with National Highways, stakeholders who engage more frequently, either monthly or weekly, with National Highways tend to use more positive language (84%) compared to those who only engage annually or a few times a year (72%). From the data, it can be inferred that this trend is likely driven by the development of closer relationships facilitated by regular communication and mutual understanding of the task at hand, roles and responsibilities.

Figure K. Q6. Thinking about the way in which they communicate with you, which of the following words or phrases, if any, do you think best describe National Highways? Base: All respondents (n = 425)



Note: The two NET scores group the negative descriptive words and the positive descriptive words. This allows us to see the proportion of stakeholders who selected positive words to describe National Highways and compare that to the proportion who selected negative words.

78. In the qualitative interviews, stakeholders were also asked to describe National Highways in words or phrases. The words used by stakeholders to describe National Highways reflected a mix of positive and negative sentiments as seen in the quantitative research.

79. Terms like "professional", "competent", "collaborative", and "helpful" highlight the strengths of National Highways. Many stakeholders appreciate the high level of professionalism they encounter in their dealings with National Highways. This term was frequently used to highlight their commitment to standards and its structured approach. National Highways was also described as helpful, particularly when they provide timely information and support that facilitates stakeholders' planning and operations.

*Pleasant. Professional. Distant perhaps. But certainly not unprofessional.
Not awful. And actually, to be fair, fairly consistent.*

Local authority

They're incredibly professional, and you know, it's quite an impressive organisation I think, and yes, generally, it's really good to work with them.

Sub-regional transport authority

80. The positive association least likely to be made with National Highways is 'transparent' (6%). This suggests that transparency is an area of improvement, particularly since it is a key quality National Highways must exhibit in its stakeholder engagements as part of its licensing conditions. This was echoed in the interviews, with several stakeholders reporting that they do not feel National Highways is sufficiently transparent, particularly around project updates and decision-making processes. Stakeholders raised concerns about a lack of clear communication, and the tendency to withhold information until late in project timelines, leaving local communities and authorities feeling excluded from essential discussions.

"National Highways should work a bit harder at early-stage collaboration with partners and being transparent and sharing of evidence and why you're formulating a particular investment proposal."

Sub-regional transport authority

National Highways have culturally been like 'You're in this box, therefore we can't share information with you.' It's just a bit inflexible. And I think that culture of stakeholder management as a concept works well if you are building a road. But if you are shaping and thinking about things and options, National Highways should work to move into a partnership rather than a transactional relationship of 'we have information, you are a stakeholder, we will decide how this works.'"

Sub-regional transport authority

81. Words like "distant", "rigid", "slow", "unresponsive", and "disconnected" indicate areas where improvements are needed. Alongside positive attributes, stakeholders identified several negative aspects in their interactions with National Highways, often stemming from communication challenges and perceived rigidity. A recurring theme was the perception of National Highways as a distant organisation. This term was used to describe a sense of detachment, where engagement felt procedural and remote. Stakeholders also described National Highways as rigid, particularly in reference to their processes and procedures. This rigidity was seen as a barrier to flexible and adaptive problem-solving.

"They feel distant. Most of my teams would describe them as an email box. We send consultations to them, they send consultations to us. We rarely see them in a room and when they do, it's infrequent and difficult to be consistent."

Local authority

"The lack of clarity on how National Highways is structured, they always feel quite a siloed organisation, but the lack of clarity for where people like me need to escalate things where we're getting stuck."

Local authority

"The operations, the people that deal with planning applications, staff like that, they tend to be less flexible."

Sub-regional transport authority

82. National Highways could shift some of these negative attributes whilst leaning further into the positive words mentioned. Addressing these negative perceptions can enhance the effectiveness of National Highways' engagements with its stakeholders and improve overall satisfaction. These descriptive words provide avenues for National Highways to improve by fostering more engaged, flexible and responsive interactions.

Differences between National Highways teams' engagement

83. Stakeholders hold differing views on the quality of engagement from different teams at National Highways (e.g. operational, strategic planning or major projects). Different stakeholders have had different experiences with each team, both positive and negative. However, there are overarching trends. Those who deal with National Highways' operational team or deal with them on major projects hold a generally positive perception of their interactions. Stakeholders generally appreciate the responsiveness of National Highways' operational teams.

"My team deal with them [NH's operational team] on a more regular, [...] on a day-to-day basis, my team work quite closely with National Highways. I'd echo the point there is a good relationship there. And whilst

there might be things we disagree on, there's a strength and relationship that is, I think, quite important."

Local authority

"[A junction], close to [our area of operation] clearly affects traffic coming in and out of [our area], and I was called by their route manager to advise me of these works, followed up very quickly with an explanatory email. But it's that kind of information that I need, in order to disseminate that to colleagues within the port, and they can approach, if appropriate, their customers to make sure routes in and out of the port can be accommodated and adjusted as necessary."

Transport operator

"At an operational level, I don't think I'd fault what happens between the teams. I think the operational teams have a very can-do attitude on both sides. At an operational level, I think there's a far greater level of cooperation, so I think that's all positive."

Local authority

84. Several stakeholders also shared positive experiences with National Highways' operational teams, regarding effectiveness and collaborative approach in resolving issues. For example, during the resurfacing work on the roundabouts near a UK airport, the operational team was praised for their responsiveness and willingness to adjust plans based on stakeholder feedback. Additionally, regular communication and coordination with operational teams have been effective in managing incidents and ensuring smooth operations.

We've been really impressed with most of the project team that have been doing the work along the airport way and at both of the roundabouts. The guys who are really on the ground, they've been really open, coming down to the airport. Some of those teams have been really, really engaged, really open to suggestions, very receptive to ideas and understanding actually, some of the challenges.

Transport operator

I just had the incident with snow a month ago and, again, that working together to try and make sure both the [A-roads in our authority] are kept clear of snow, which it didn't happen on that particular day. But, you know, just that working together, the operational tends to be much more on the responsive side.

Local authority

85. On the other hand, interactions with the National Highways' strategic team are seen as less effective and efficient. These interactions are generally more challenging, with concerns about transparency, and alignment of strategic priorities. Strategic engagement requires more thorough communication and coordination, which stakeholders feel is sometimes lacking. The delay in sharing business cases for significant projects, such as for A road junctions, highlights the need for more proactive and transparent communication.

"From some of the team that we're working on [A-road] junctions [in our authority], we got quite a bit of pushback when we first started asking to see the business case. We were sent strategic case originally after some pushing. We kept asking to see the rest of the business case and just weren't getting anywhere with it. I don't think all the emails were even acknowledged, to be honest."

Local authority

86. Another challenge in strategic engagement is the perceived rigidity in processes and decision-making. Strategic decisions can sometimes lack coherence and fail to consider local needs and priorities. Stakeholders feel that strategic teams could benefit from adopting a more flexible and collaborative approach.

"We found National Highways to be extremely difficult. They were inflexible, wouldn't engage with us in a communicative way. Clearly all of these organisations have split into different departments, the particular department dealing with that, which I think is their planning side, was very different from the way that we'd normally deal with other parts of National Highways."

Transport operator

"It feels very tick-box at times with them at a stage in a process that they're following, rather than actually working with us during that process to help us unpack stuff and unpick stuff with them, for them, for the greater good."

Local authority

87. As a result, stakeholders feel that it is critical for National Highways to build stronger relationships with them, emphasising that effective engagement is not only about fostering personal connections but also about improving processes and ensuring consistency. The ORR can play a supportive role by providing guidance and oversight to help National Highways standardise their engagement practices.

Attitude and tone of National Highways engagements and interactions

88. As mentioned earlier in this section, National Highways' engagement and interactions are seen as professional, but some stakeholders highlight issues with the attitude and tone used among other technical issues.
89. In terms of the tone of the interactions with National Highways, there are again some mixed responses from stakeholders. On one hand, some had similar descriptions to what was found in the online survey, describing their interactions as professional, courteous, polite and highlighting that the consistent professional tone exhibited by National Highways has helped maintain respectful engagements.

"Always very professional, polite, to the point."

Local authority

"It's just a professional meeting, courteous meeting, things are said, actions are put forward and undertaken, reported back."

Local authority

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90. However, a few stakeholders described National Highways' tone as direct and to the point. In some cases, this is found helpful in terms of clarity and efficiency. In other cases, this directness is sometimes perceived as rigid, limiting the opportunity for more collaborative discussions.

"It feels like we're having our homework marked and we're back at school. That's not a very pleasant feeling, I think, for people who are trying to push forward on a scheme and them criticising what we were doing on our own network."

Local authority

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91. There were also several stakeholders that feel the tone from National Highways is more negative, particularly coming from the strategic team. For example, 'feeling patronised' was a phrase used by some stakeholders and there were instances where stakeholders felt that the tone of National Highways' communication borders on arrogance or is not well-suited to the audience they are addressing.

"They'd be quite patronising about us and the local network, do you know what I mean? 'We're the big boys in the playground, you lot are the little kids playing in the corner.'"

Local authority

“There's a bit of, I mean, arrogance is quite a negative term. But there is a little bit of that about them as an organisation which is that [...] they know best. It's their network, they're just going to get on with it. And I suppose, if there's some way they could break down that in terms of their reputation, then that would be good.”

Local authority

92. Such perceptions of arrogance or a mismatch in approach alienates stakeholders, making it challenging to develop a trusting and productive relationship. This has led to disputes and delays which require more back and forth, and therefore expenditure in terms of resource and possible delay.
93. This issue seems to stem from a lack of understanding or consideration of the specific context, needs, and priorities of the local stakeholders. This behaviour of National Highways has led stakeholders to perceive it inflexible, defensive, even arrogant, and that this tone hinders effective collaboration.

There certainly has been a lack of understanding. When you're diverting the traffic from the M25 on local roads, that's going to cause some problems. You are going to cause disruption but the more comms you can do the better.

Local authority

We felt very much like we were on the periphery, just feeding information through, didn't get a lot of feedback from National Highways, and then, things went quiet.

Sub-regional transport authority

94. Overall, we see some positive descriptions and mentions of the engagements that stakeholders had with National Highways, but there are also fairly negative views and experiences. While the professional and polite approach is generally appreciated, National Highways would benefit from balancing directness with flexibility, moving from a procedural tone to a more collaborative one, and ensuring that communication is considerate of the local context.
95. Reflecting on the feedback provided by stakeholders, we recommend that ORR helps encourage National Highways to adopt more consistent, transparent, and collaborative communication practices. As part of this, ORR should work to understand the current tone of voice National Highways adopts in its communication practices and should work to understand their communications strategy as an organisation. Once this information is gathered, we recommend that ORR works with National Highways to shift its tone of voice, keeping that professionalism that stakeholders praised but adapting their approach to be more aligned with the needs of their diverse list of stakeholders. This in turn will contribute to higher satisfaction scores with National Highways and will help National Highways fulfil the conditions of their license.

National Highways engagements vs. other organisations

96. It is worth noting, however, that despite the mixed views, National Highways is perceived more positively than Network Rail (in both the quant and qual elements). Several stakeholders drew comparisons between their experiences with National Highways and Network Rail. Generally, Network Rail is perceived as less collaborative and more challenging to engage with effectively. Stakeholders feel that National Highways are more professional and reliable in communication than Network Rail.

“Network Rail are a nightmare to work with, it tends to be very confrontational as far as they're concerned, they've got all the powers that they need to do everything that they want to do, and you as a highway authority can go and do none of it.”

Local Authority

“[...] Network Rail. You talk to someone, they agree, it goes to a different department or goes through a process. And then all of a sudden, 'Computer says no.'”

Local Authority

“And part of the reason why we like engaging with National Highways is they are so open, honest, transparent, and approachable. Whereas some of the other people that we deal with, including the Environment Agency, who are just incompetent, and Network Rail, who are just siloed and relatively unhelpful.”

Transport operator

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97. In comparison to other organisations, stakeholders' engagement with other transport bodies like the Department for Transport (DfT) and Transport for the North (TfN) often highlights a more localised, responsive, and collaborative dynamic. This responsiveness and localised approach are seen as benchmarks that National Highways could adopt more widely.

“If I think about National Highways and I compare them to my relationship with Transport for the North or DfT, I'm much closer to the other 2 and I think that's because we have more regular catch-up meetings with them, I've got a better rapport with them, they'll email me with updates, I'll email them with updates. So, we've got that 2-way relationship going and we've got a bit more of a personal connection as well, which I don't feel I've got with National Highways yet.”

Local authority

98. Stakeholders did note that other national organisations give regular, proactive updates, which helps in planning and managing joint responsibilities. For instance, National Grid Energy Transmission sends regular updates about their planned works, which local authorities find helpful. Network Rail occasionally shares quarterly updates and strategic business plans with stakeholders. Such practices ensure that all involved parties are informed about ongoing and upcoming projects, which stakeholders feel would be beneficial for National Highways to adopt. Others also referenced Active Travel England’s transparency protocols, noting that the organisation regularly publishes decisions and rationales in publicly accessible formats, ensuring accountability and open communication. Developing similar transparency protocols would allow National Highways to overcome the perceptions mentioned earlier in the report of National Highways showing limited transparency.

“From other similar sized agencies, some of the train companies and some of those other organisations, we will get a quarterly update from their director, or their MD. Just a business update, what's going on in their world. And it just helps us understand where they're at.”

Local authority

“[Regional Wildlife Trust, RSPB, the District Councils], those who have an interest in [our area]. It does feel as if that's a meaningful engagement, that they are actually trying to seek the views of all the different stakeholders involved with the park and trying to find common ground.”

Local authority

“[They] developed a very comprehensive analytical framework, which is basically using data to better understand [our area], and then, forecast what would an intervention achieve? The analytical tool is available for sharing. It has been developed wherever possible to be open source, so it can be shared with DfT, national agencies and with local partners. There's an ongoing role in ensuring you get the best value for money out of data resources.”

Sub-regional transport authority

“I think they could maybe learn a bit more in terms of their working with people and their attitude to working with people, and also-, yes, I suppose again the clarity in terms of policy and why they're doing things. So, Active Travel England have produced a lot of tools and resources, training webinars and things like that to help people like me understand where they're coming from, which is really helpful. And maybe National Highways could do more on that side of things.”

Local authority

99. Additionally, others mention that their relationships with more localised organisations, such as regional combined authorities and local councils, are much

more meaningful which helps foster collaborative engagements and joint project working. Such collaboration efforts are exhibited through planning workshops. These workshops engage stakeholders early in the planning processes, incorporating community feedback to refine project plans and ensure they align with local needs. Stakeholders appreciate this inclusive approach and believe National Highways can benefit from implementing collaborative workshops that encourage stakeholder involvement from the outset of project planning. This would address stakeholder criticisms about underestimating local concerns and these early planning and collaborative efforts will improve project relevancy and stakeholder satisfaction.

“We have a transport strategy working group, which was set up for the first transport strategy. This workshop deals with people at different levels of each organisation at each meeting and we talk about our new strategy and our strategic investment plans.”

Sub-regional transport authority

“We are having regular dialogue with them and making progress on a range of issues with them as well. So, within the region, those relationships are much stronger, and I think much more well established. [They] have been really positive in setting out that whole transport infrastructure and priorities as to what are the key outcomes that we're trying to deliver, being very clear on that vision and also, with a much heavier emphasis on sustainability, active travel, public transport than you see on other schemes. We put similar ideas forward to National Highways but there was just no appetite whatsoever.”

Local authority

100. By learning from other organisations in the sector, National Highways could improve its stakeholder engagement. Based on stakeholder feedback on best practices they've seen from other organisations, we recommend the ORR collect and share these best practice examples with National Highways so they can learn from successes and develop their own engagement mechanisms and strategies. Focusing on areas that others excel at will help keep National Highways at the top of the benchmark against other transport bodies.

Assessment against the licence conditions

- 101. An important part of National Highways’ engagement with stakeholders is adhering to licence conditions 5.17-5.19. This section aims to help understand how well National Highways is performing when it comes to meeting the licensing requirements.
- 102. Feedback has been grouped together into four areas: local needs, engagement, cooperation and qualities that stakeholders want National Highways to demonstrate in its stakeholder engagement. Some of these themes overlap multiple licence conditions as follows:

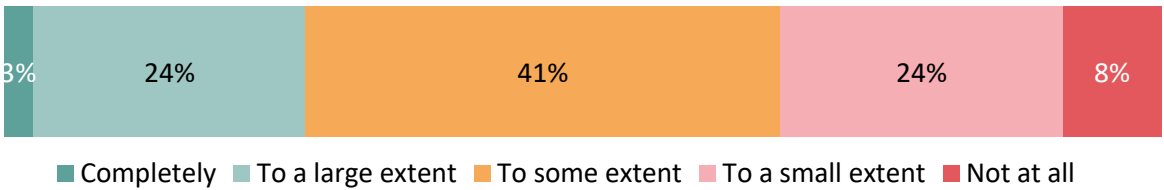
Local needs – 5.17c, 5.17d, 5.18
Engagement – 5.19
Cooperation – 5.17, 5.18
Qualities requirement – 5.19

Local needs

5.17c. National Highways should take account of local needs, priorities and plans in planning for the operation, maintenance and long-term development of the network

- 103. Most respondents (41%) believe National Highways takes into account local needs, priorities and plans to some extent. However, a third feel like National Highways only takes local needs, priorities and plans to a small extent or not at all.

Figure L. Q7. When planning the operation of the Strategic Road Network (SRN), to what extent, if at all, do you feel that National Highways takes into account local needs, priorities, and plans?
Base: All respondents (n=425)



- 104. Stakeholders working on major projects (32%) are more likely to feel that National Highways considers local needs and priorities completely or to a large extent compared to those dealing with National Highways for operational reasons (22%) and those involved in route strategies (18%).
- 105. Other groups that are more likely to feel that National Highways considers local needs and priorities completely or to a large extent are those whose engagement with National Highways is frequent (monthly and/or weekly) (36%) and those who perceive engagement with it as good (44%). Stakeholders in the qual interviews also

highlighted how regular contact leads to National Highways taking more into account local needs, priorities and plans.

“National Highways have taken part in a couple of project boards that we've had for developing the strategic transport plan and the strategic investment plan, and we've had an officer from National Highways on the project board too. So, that's just another example of the regular contact that we do have with National Highways, and I'd also add to that National Highways, if anything urgent comes up, will contact us and likewise, are very open to being contacted by ourselves as well. So, I would say, overall, that the communications that we have with National Highways are frequent and very good.”

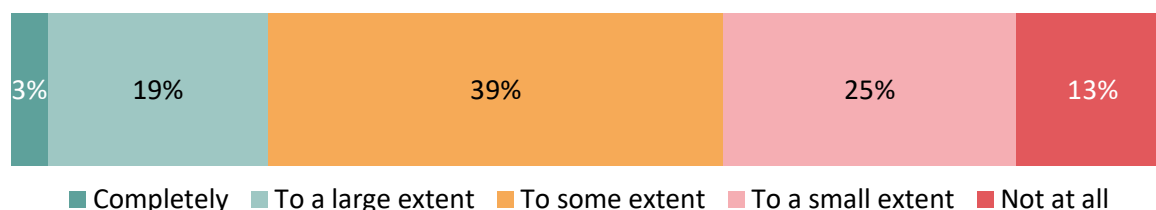
Sub-regional transport authority

5.17d. Provide reasonable support to local authorities in their planning and the management of their own networks.

106. Similarly, local authorities (39%) believe National Highways has supported planning and managing of their own road networks to some extent.

Figure M. Q8. To what extent, if at all, do you feel that National Highways has supported planning and managing your local authority's own road networks?

Base: All local authorities and political bodies excluding 'Don't know' answers (n=257)



107. Groups that are more likely to feel that National Highways has supported their local road networks completely or to a large extent are those whose engagement with National Highways is frequent (monthly and/or weekly) (26%) and those who perceive engagement with it as good (29%). This highlights how regular contact leads to better perceptions from local authorities of National Highways' support in planning and managing their local networks.
108. It is worth noting that local authorities in the qualitative interviews tend to have a mixed view on this subject, and while they say there is cooperation and support efforts, they emphasise the need for improved communication, consistent planning processes, and better responsiveness to local needs.

"I don't have any, sort of, feel for them doing anything which actively supports us managing our road network."

Combined authority

"We want to pick up the phone and talk to somebody about it, and that's where it becomes difficult and frustrating."

Local Authority

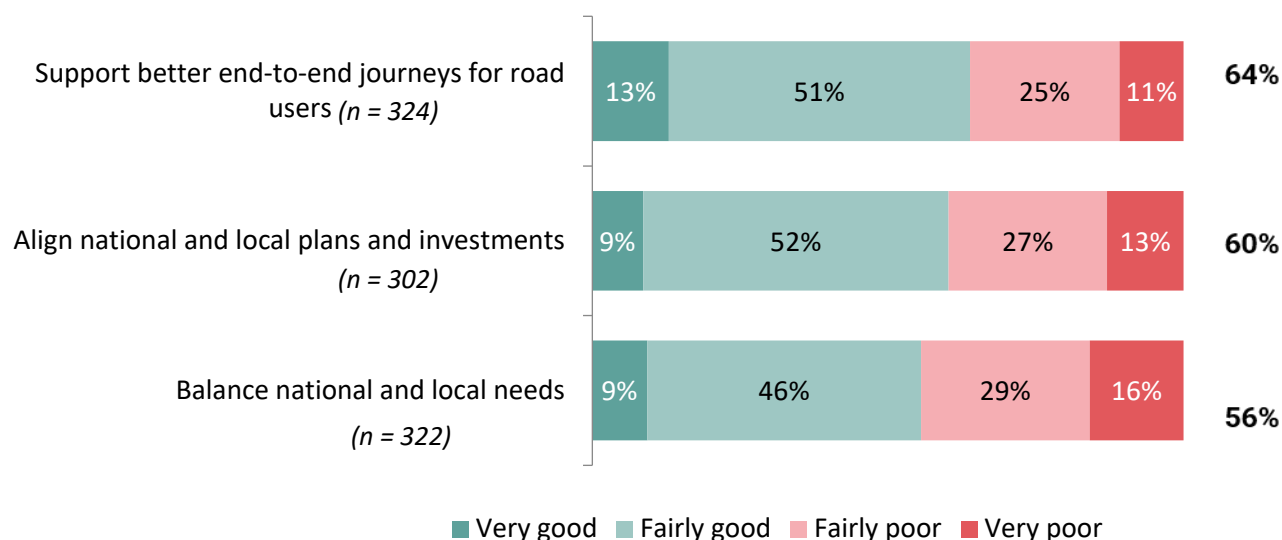
"The strategic road network is only 2.5% of the road network in the country. The next tier down are major A roads, managed by local authorities. And some of which are used as diversion routes when the SRN is closed for whatever reason. So, there's a need to keep working on better integration of the operation and communication around those routes."

Sub-regional transport authority

5.18. The Licence holder should cooperate with, consult and take reasonable account of the views of Local authorities and devolved administrations

109. More than six in ten stakeholders who have an opinion rated National Highways positively in supporting better end-to-end journeys (64%) and aligning national and local plans and investments (61%). National Highways was seen least positively on balancing national and local needs (55%)

Figure N. Q14. How would you rate National Highways at each of the following?
Base: All respondents excluding Don't know **NET: Very/
fairly good**



110. Stakeholders working on major projects with National Highways are more likely to perceive it positively in all three areas (support better end-to-end journeys for road users 58%, align national and local plans and investments 50%, balance national and local needs 50%).
111. Other groups that are more positive about National Highways' activities in any of the three areas are those whose engagement with National Highways is very frequent (weekly) and those who rate the engagement with it as good.
112. Those involved in route strategies were the least positive in each of these areas (45%, 36% and 49% respectively) as the proportion of those saying fairly poor or very poor was higher compared to major projects and operations.
113. The qualitative interviews provide further insight as to why there are differences among these three areas.
114. For major projects, these higher levels of satisfaction are related to:
- I. **Depth of Engagement:** stakeholders in the interviews explain how major projects involve comprehensive planning phases where detailed consultations with local stakeholders are essential and legally required. This results in more opportunities for stakeholders (especially for local authorities) to influence decisions and ensure their regional needs are considered.

- II. **Significant Investment:** The high stakes and substantial investments in major projects drive National Highways to ensure local priorities are met to avoid delays and potential conflicts.
- III. **Visibility and Impact:** Major projects are highly visible and impact many communities, prompting National Highways to be more attentive to local concerns to maintain public support and project viability.

“One of the big ones we’ve had for a number of years is to build on the old American air base. And that’s been a massive development, which has required a lot of investment to ensure that is not only served locally but, off the SRN. For these kind of projects there will be general meetings and specific meetings, given the scale of what we’re looking at, and then regular contact throughout. So, National Highways at times have sat on various project boards, not only as a consultee, but, as a key partner.”

Local Authority

- 115. As seen before in this report, stakeholders who engage with National Highways for operational reasons are more likely to provide a 'Poor' rating for engagement. This could be linked to:
 - I. **Standard Procedures:** Operational tasks follow standardised protocols that may not always consider unique local needs dynamically, which causes frustration among stakeholders.
 - II. **Immediate Response:** Issues are often addressed without extensive consultation, leading stakeholders to perceive less consideration of broader regional priorities.
 - III. **Limited Strategic Flexibility:** The focus on immediate operational efficiency can sometimes result in a rigidity that doesn't allow for the integration of wider strategic concerns.

“When you go into the National Highways departments, they’re very process driven, there is no flex and it does feel sometimes like, 'Computer says no.' So, you’d have an idea of something which we want to progress and improve for the people in our city. The SRN runs right into the centre of the city, so National Highways really get right down into it. And when we want to try and do things, sometimes we find that National Highways can be a bit of a blocker because there’s no flex. It appears very much like I say, 'Computer says no.' And it might be that the people whom we initially talked to are actually quite enthralled by it and want to make it happen. But then, because they’re such a big organisation, they go off and either someone from road safety, departures or someone in another team says, 'No, that’s not going to work.' And then all of a sudden, that’s it, it’s not working, we can’t do it anymore.”*

Local Authority

“So, the project delivery side, when they go through the PCF process, which is when they deliver a project, they kept saying to me, 'The legislation dictates what we do.’ And my push back was, “Yes, I get that the

legislation dictates what we do. But If I followed the legislation to the word of what I was supposed to be doing, I probably wouldn't be having this conversation with you, because legislation is like one line and it doesn't say in my legislation, 'You must speak to National Highways on their stakeholder engagement interview.' It doesn't say that, but it doesn't mean that this isn't a really, really important thing for me,” And that I think is where National Highways on the project development side just did not work flexibly with us.”

Sub-regional transport authority

*In this context, departures refers to a formal process for assessing and approving deviations from standard design requirements and operational practices.

116. Lastly, for stakeholders dealing with route strategies, there are a number of different areas that might explain the lower score seen before:
- I. **Predict and Provide Model:** Stakeholders explain that this traditional traffic forecasting model can lead to a conservative approach that fails to dynamically incorporate local needs.
 - II. **Lack of Integration:** Strategic plans sometimes struggle to align national priorities with local specifics, causing frustration among stakeholders who feel their local priorities are overlooked.
 - III. **Strategic vs Operational Disconnect:** There can be a disconnect between strategic route plans and localised operational needs, making it difficult to implement comprehensive solutions.

“The whole philosophy of the old predict and provide models, how much do we predict the traffic flows are going to be and therefore what do we need to provide, has much more gone for us to ‘what is our vision and how do we validate that going forward?’ At the moment, National Highways are very much in the position of, 'We want vision and to validate but actually, as a fallback to protect ourselves, we need you to also do predict and provide.' In transport planning, you can't run both of those together necessarily but as soon as you get an economic advisor coming down from London into the area, they can understand why we're trying to push on vision and validate and that the predict and provide is something we shouldn't be looking at now. So, National Highways have a mindset of keeping everything in a way they're familiar with rather than actually transitioning to a new way of thinking.”

Local Authority

“Where we really see a disconnect is where there are these special project teams coming in and doing their thing over and above the business-as-usual maintenance activities. That's where things probably get most problematic, because you see the gaps between those teams and business-as-usual. You see the conflicts between them, let alone any conflicts with us.”

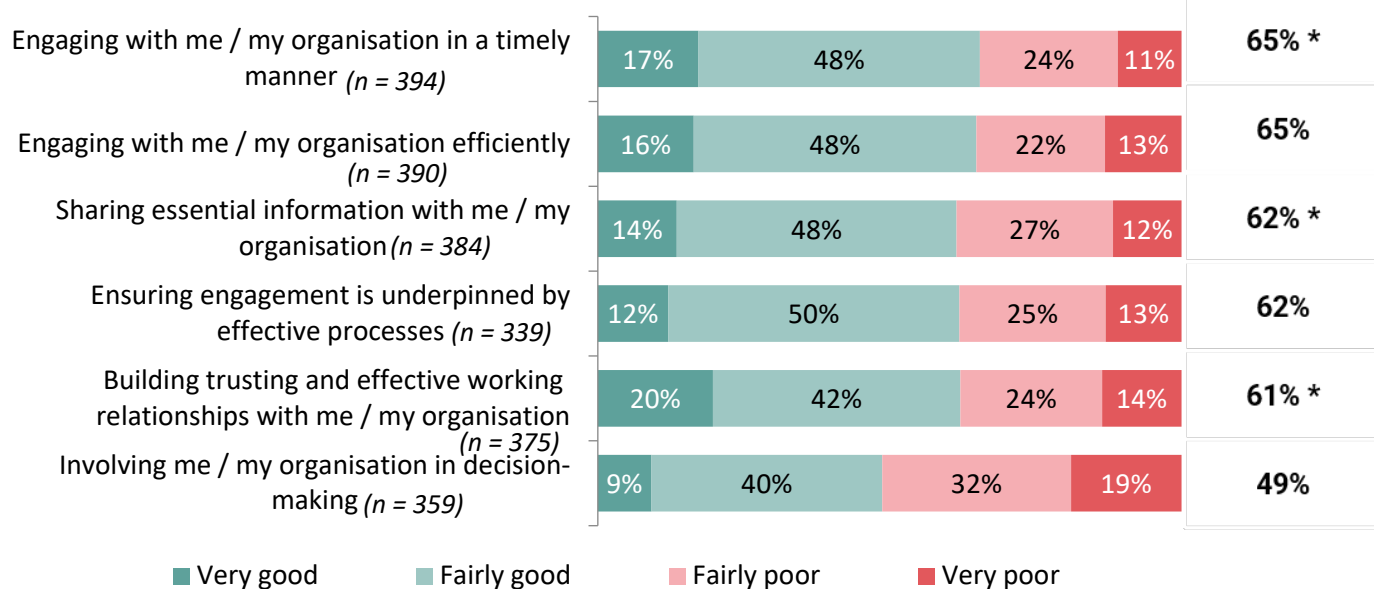
Engagement

5.19. The Licence holder should co-operate with other persons or organisations in a way which is: Open, transparent, positive, responsive and collaborative

117. Engaging in a timely and efficient manner received the highest positive ratings (65%) from stakeholders who had an opinion, while involving stakeholders in decision-making lagged, with half (49%) giving a positive rating.

Figure O. Q12. How would you rate National Highways at each of the following?

Base: All respondents excluding DK



* Stakeholders working on major projects are more likely to give positive scores for these statements than those dealing with National Highways for operational reasons.

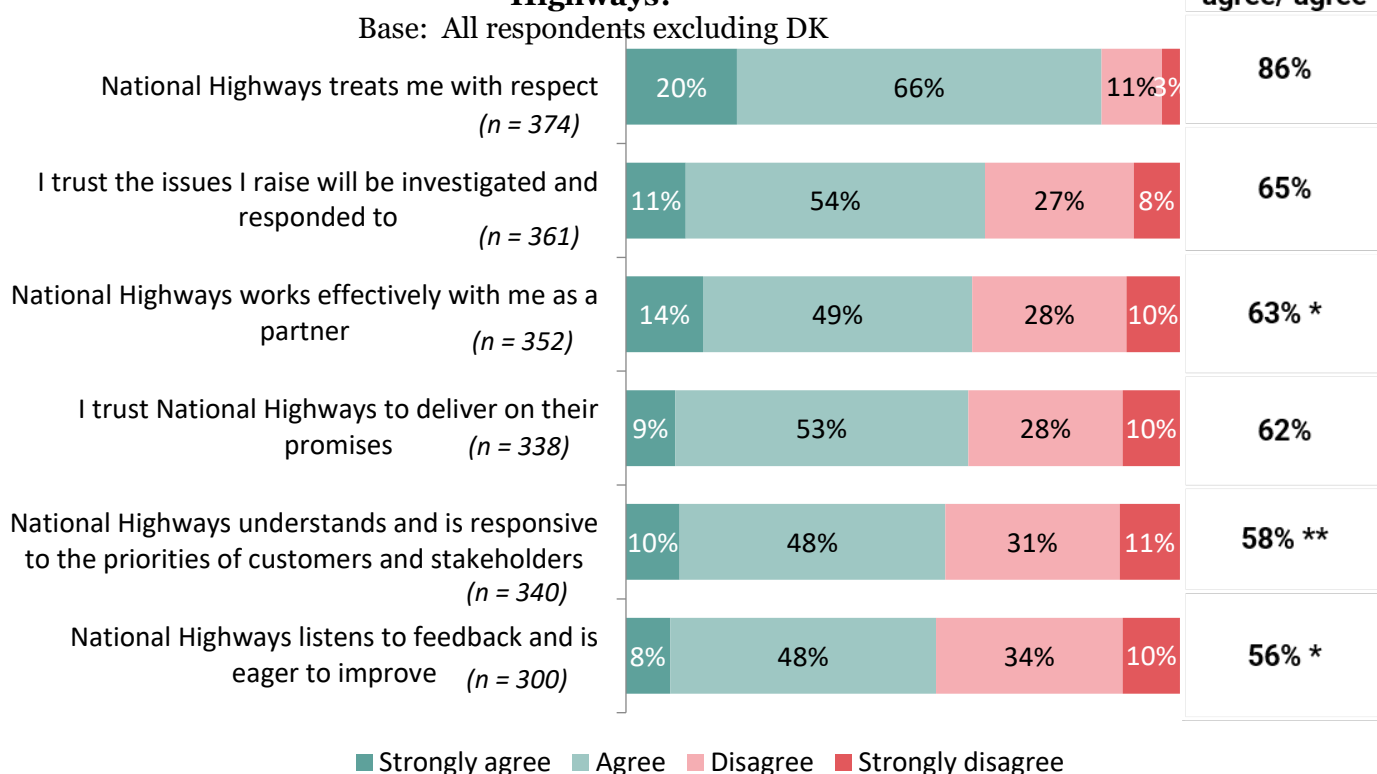
118. In the qualitative interviews, these mixed views are also apparent, with many stakeholders expressing how there is room for improvement when it comes to engagement. One key area is involving stakeholders earlier in projects to identify any potential risks or issues that might happen later down the line.

“Engage even earlier with the local authorities. It's not really a criticism but I think there has been a tendency to come to the local authorities when schemes are quite well advanced in terms of their thinking. And I just think engaging with the local authorities at a much, much earlier stage helps further on down the line. I think National Highways are very good at this generally in engaging. But I've always had that feeling that they've almost made up their minds by the time they go and talk to the local authorities”

Sub-regional transport authority

119. The majority (86%) of stakeholders who have an opinion also **feel respected** by National Highways, but fewer believe the organisation listens to feedback and is eager to improve (56%)

Figure P. Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your interactions and engagement with National Highways?



* Stakeholders working on major projects are more likely to give positive scores than those dealing with National Highways for operational reasons.

** Stakeholders working on major projects are more likely to give positive scores than those dealing with National Highways for operational reasons and those involved in route strategies.

120. Similarly in the interviews, some stakeholders express how they don't feel like National Highways takes into account the priorities of the customers in their network.

"During the daytime, when our roads are at their busiest, there's all this random signage dotted around, obscuring site lines, possibly confusing people and just generally unhelpful. You can understand why, they think 'Oh, well, I won't bother flattening them, we will put them up again anyway.' Because they're spending all that time and effort. But, for our network, it would be far better if all those signs were laid flat. If we're doing works on our network and we're having to divert traffic around on our network, we're having to factor in the fact that there's conflicting signage dotted around. And we might have to symbolise a local diversion

route so that people don't confuse it with the signage that's left out for [National Highways'] evening motorway closure. So, it's little things like that that make me feel they don't always understand us and our customers, that lack of forethought."

Local Authority

121. Another key area affecting stakeholders' perceptions of National Highways is their relationship with subcontractors and consultants. Some stakeholders in the qualitative interviews express the following issues when interacting with third party contractors:

I. Disjointed Communication:

Stakeholders mention how contractors seem to be the main points of contact for some projects and how they have their own communication styles and ways of working. Whilst for the majority of the time this isn't an issue, the lack of direct National Highways contact makes it difficult to resolve issues when contractors do not understand instructions or requirements.

Additionally, finding the right contact person at National Highways for the relevant issue seems to be difficult for stakeholders.

"They always use third party contractors, so normally, the negotiations are with them, which is one of the problems, because you've never got a contact at National Highways that you can go to if things aren't working out with the contractor, for whatever reason. For example, if you've got a contractor that doesn't understand what you're telling them, you can't go to National Highways and say, 'This contractor, you're explaining something to them but they're not getting it.'"

Local Authority

II. Legal and Practical Non-compliance:

A few stakeholders expressed how contractors sometimes lack the understanding or awareness of legal implications that local authorities and National Highways need to take into account.

The lack of legal knowledge from contractors often results in legal and practical problems that have to be managed or rectified by the local authorities.

"A public footpath for example, is a legal highway and it's got the same protection as a road, it's just that it's not tarmacked. So if you're walking along a public footpath from A to B and it doesn't wander all over the place, it follows a set line. So if National Highways do works that impact upon that set line, then if its position isn't convenient, they should apply to divert it. And that's where I get involved. But quite often, they don't engage sufficiently in advance. During the process, they just fob it off onto the

contractors who aren't always aware of the legal implications of what they're doing. And then at the end of the project, they quite often walk away and say, 'The contractors have left the site.' But if there are parts of the project that still need to be finalised, they contractors are very difficult to pin down after they've left. For the public footpath project I mentioned earlier, we had to finish off the works that they'd left undone. There were some gates that they were meant to put in and things like that, and they just didn't bother. I was chasing them for months and months, and in the end, we said we would do it, because for them it was only a couple of gates, but for us, it was a big finishing off of the project."

Local Authority

III. Frustrations and Inefficiencies:

Overall, stakeholders would like National Highways to provide clear contact points within the organisation who are accountable and can handle escalations effectively when contractors are involved.

Where relevant, National Highways should carry on ensuring that there is a main contact from National Highways overseeing contractors' work comprehensively to maintain compliance and proper communication levels.

"For the major works they've done recently, it took me a very long time to get the contractor to understand what I needed them to do. They just didn't get it and thought I was being a nuisance. It then went onto somebody else who did get it and was very helpful. But by then, the works had been completed, and we still haven't managed to start on the legal works, because only recently I finally managed to get a hold of somebody in National Highways after 4 or 5 months trying to get a hold of somebody. They don't put telephone numbers on their emails and the contractors weren't sure who the main contact was either. So, you find out by chance. You're copied in on an email which has gone to somebody else, and then you've suddenly got a name and an email address. But they sometimes don't respond and it goes on and on. I was lucky in that particular case because I actually know somebody who works at National Highways who used to work for my council, and he's been really helpful in trying to get to the bottom of things. But it's not his job. He shouldn't have to act as a go between. But sometimes that's the only way you can get a hold of people, because they're just completely unaccountable."

Local Authority

Cooperation

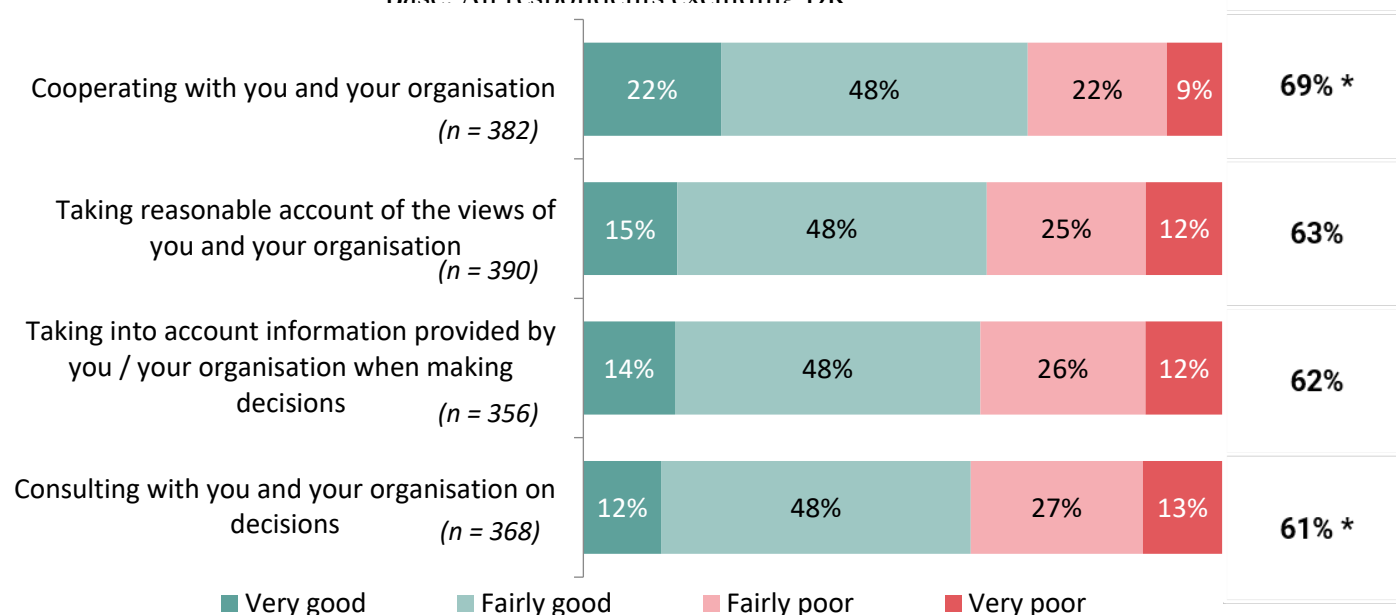
5.17. The Licence holder should co-operate with other persons or organisations

5.18. The Licence holder should cooperate with, consult and take reasonable account of the views of Local authorities and devolved administrations

122. There are mixed opinions on cooperation with National Highways. Around six in ten stakeholders who had an opinion rated National Highways as 'very/fairly good' across all cooperation statements, while around four in ten rated it as 'very/fairly poor'

Figure Q. Q9. How would you rate National Highways on each of the following criteria?

Base: All respondents excluding DK



* Stakeholders working on major projects are more likely to give positive score than those dealing with National Highways for operational reasons.

123. Similarly, participants in the qualitative interviews have mixed opinions when it comes to National Highways cooperating and consulting with them. **Positive experiences** highlight collaborative relationships and early engagement in some projects as well as regular updates. These stakeholders appreciate National Highways' efforts to explain their actions and value stakeholder input.
124. However, a few stakeholders have had **negative experiences** related to 'defensive' consultations and strategic meetings that sometimes feel like tick-box exercises. These critiques are mostly highlighted by local authorities who believe National Highways doesn't take into account the priorities of the local area.

"I sometimes feel it's a tick box exercise, that, 'You're a stakeholder and I, therefore, need to meet with you on a quarterly basis, but that's it.' It doesn't feel meaningful at times and, equally, I think some of the engagement we do on planning issues, feels like it's a master-servant

relationship, 'We're National Highways, you're a local authority, we will give you our opinion.' It doesn't feel right, does that make sense? My staff have said to me before that it's like they are 'Marking our homework,'. So, I feel that sometimes strategic meetings are definitely a tick box exercise."

Local Authority

"There's definitely an attempt to be collaborative and engaged, but at times it feels a bit superficial and a bit defensive as well. When we highlight something that's a problem, I think it would be a lot better if they just said, 'Do you know what? You're quite right, that's a problem.' But they're a bit defensive and, sort of, 'Oh, yes. You know, leave this with us. We'll go and look at it.' And, of course, this is an unusual relationship with them because we're both managing our own networks to the best of our ability. They're a very different network. Obviously, mine has businesses, residents, small, local roads. Whereas theirs is, by its nature, more strategic and, obviously, the volumes of traffic are on a different scale. So, you've got 2 people managing a road network, intertwined with one another. But the road networks are of such different characteristics, that finding the best approach to suit both is always the challenge. And I think they don't necessarily consider the implications on the neighbouring networks as well as they could do."

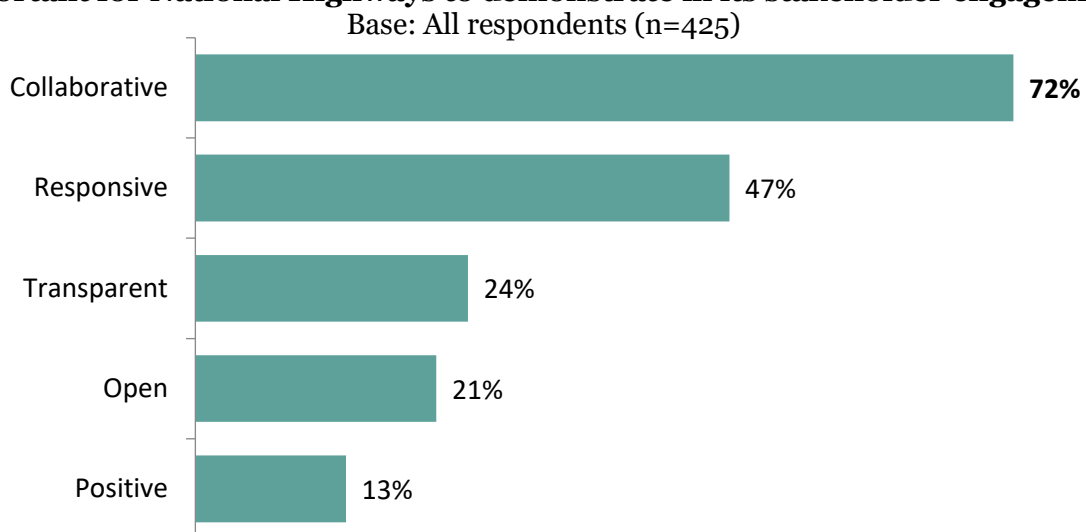
Local Authority

Qualities requirements

5.19. The Licence holder should co-operate with other persons or organisations in a way which is: Open, transparent, positive, responsive and collaborative

125. Three quarters of respondents believe that being collaborative is the most important quality for National Highways in their stakeholder engagement, followed by just under half emphasising responsiveness.

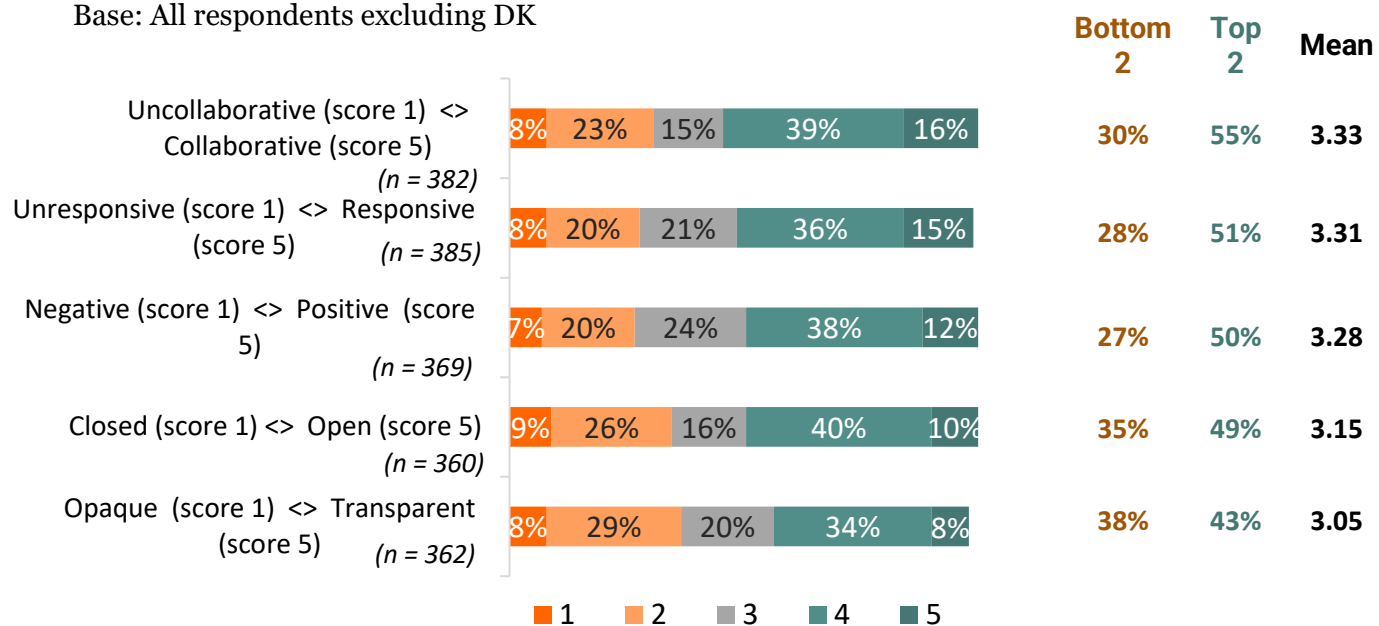
Figure R. Q10. Which of the following qualities, if any, do you think are most important for National Highways to demonstrate in its stakeholder engagement?



126. On average, half of the stakeholders who had an opinion scored National Highways on all qualities 4 or 5. A significant proportion—approximately a third on average—scored National Highways 1 or 2 on all attributes. The highest percentage of 1 or 2 scores was for the attribute ‘opaque,’ at 38%.

Figure S. Q11. Please indicate where you would place National Highways between each of the following pairs of statements.

Base: All respondents excluding DK



127. In the qualitative interviews, similarly to the online survey, the vast majority of stakeholders highlight collaboration as the most crucial quality for National Highways.
128. They suggest a true collaborative effort inherently encompasses openness, transparency, and responsiveness, as stakeholders believe all of these attributes would be shown in true collaboration.
129. While National Highways is seen by most as collaborative and professional, especially for major projects, there are critiques regarding **strategic-level transparency**. Stakeholders would like National Highways to raise any concerns earlier that might hinder a project. As seen before, some stakeholders mention how different teams of National Highways might not agree with a plan but don't explain their reasoning, which causes frustration and uncertainty of whether future projects would be approved or not.
130. Stakeholders believe National Highways could be more collaborative and transparent through improving **proactive communication**, which in turn should enhance partnership efforts and achieve mutual goals effectively.

"I think whoever was emailing us was a bit more defensive, because we were trying to challenge the data they'd used and say whether it was more recent data that would lift the BCR. So, we got a bit of a defensive response. Obviously, if they'd said 'Thank you. Appreciate that. This is why we've used the data that we have.,' Maybe phrase it in a different way, that could have been better, but even when they sent us a strategic piece, which was really welcome, if they'd just said, 'Look, we can't send you the rest. This is why..., ' and thinking about how that was phrased, that would improve things."

Local Authority

Improvements and recommendations

131. Overall, our findings show that stakeholders perceive National Highways' engagement with them as satisfactory. However, stakeholders also offer insights into areas where ORR might wish to work with National Highways to improve the company's future engagement, and stakeholders' perceptions. The recommendations below are based on this feedback from stakeholders.

Early and Meaningful Engagement

132. Stakeholders demonstrate high familiarity with National Highways, particularly among those involved in strategic and major project roles, where regular strategic meetings and consultations are common. While National Highways currently engages stakeholders through strategic meetings that allow for input on major projects, stakeholders indicate that engagement in scheme development often occurs too late for meaningful influence.
133. To further enhance this engagement, **it is recommended that ORR considers exploring with National Highways whether its approach to engaging stakeholders in scheme development provides meaningful insight, and supports early engagement that could better assist local growth and development priorities.** By emphasising early involvement, stakeholders can better align their priorities and influence projects constructively from the outset, preventing misunderstandings and fostering consensus with local authorities.
134. Feedback suggests that earlier engagement would improve transparency and responsiveness, addressing challenges associated with stakeholder contributions occurring after key decisions are made, thereby enabling deeper relationships and strategic alignment. It could have the additional benefit of providing insights from those closest to the issues on how best National Highways' schemes and plans can support local growth and development.

Enhancing Collaboration and Communication Structures

135. Stakeholders voiced the need for more transparent sharing of evidence, such as data supporting investment decisions and proposals outlining future projects. They also highlighted the need for clearer explanations regarding delays or cancellations, as these are crucial for aligning expectations and plans.
136. Currently, National Highways typically employs a communication structure that includes periodic updates and the distribution of reports to stakeholders. These updates, often shared through email communications or during scheduled meetings, may not delve deeply into specifics, leaving stakeholders with broad overviews rather than the comprehensive insights needed for effective planning and decision-making. This has led to perceived ambiguity. The infrequent nature of these updates also presents challenges. There is also a desire for reliable and clear communication protocols, including setting specific timelines for updates, defining contact points for various issues, and ensuring that information is communicated transparently and predictably.

137. **We recommend ORR discusses with National Highways how it optimises its communications to ensure they are sufficiently detailed and of a frequency to keep stakeholders well-informed and engaged, and to support them in their decision making. The company's communications should be efficient and responsive whilst maintaining a professional tone of voice that will ultimately strengthen stakeholder interactions and facilitate the alignment of strategic priorities with local needs.**
138. It is important that National Highways has the right collaboration and communication structures to minimise gaps in communication and engagement. At present, stakeholders observe that planning processes can seem inconsistent across different projects, with variability arises due to differing project scales, regional needs, or departmental involvement. This can lead to confusion and can hinder stakeholders' ability to manage involvement effectively. **National Highways has mature planning processes and frameworks for project development, particularly for major enhancement projects. We recommend that ORR work with the company to ensure that these encompass appropriate requirements to ensure that stakeholders are engaged early and are regularly informed. This could help to support joined up decision making on local growth and priorities.**
139. Stakeholders report that perceived adherence to bureaucratic protocols hampers collaborative strategic engagement, particularly when flexibility is required to address local priorities or unanticipated challenges. For example, some told us that pre-COVID senior-level meetings (any i.e. online, in-person, etc.) had not been reinstated. These would provide regular touchpoints for addressing strategic concerns, fostering better relationships and perceptions. **We recommend that ORR seeks assurance from National Highways that its approach to senior-level stakeholder meetings supports a consistent and strategic dialogue between the company and its stakeholders to build and sustain strong relationships and support one another's strategic goals.**

Knowledge Sharing and Support

140. Stakeholders raised the challenge of identifying the right points of contact for different issues or projects. **We recommend that ORR discusses with National Highways how best to communicate its organisational structure with stakeholders (as far as it is relevant), and more importantly, how it signposts appropriate points of contact to its stakeholders. This would help to minimise administrative and bureaucratic burdens for those stakeholders and streamline channels of communication.**
141. While National Highways conducts some proactive outreach and updates, stakeholders report gaps in communication, particularly in routine operational updates and during changes in project status. This can leave stakeholders feeling disconnected or unaware of developments unless they actively seek information themselves. **We recommend that ORR discuss with National Highways its proactive outreach efforts and how it is assured that all stakeholders receive timely updates without needing to initiate contact. A single, possibly automated process could efficiently help minimise discrepancies.**
142. Stakeholders expressed concerns over perceived siloed communications that occur when different teams at National Highways appear to be not aligned in sharing

information. This can result in stakeholders having a fragmented understanding of projects and decisions impacting overall efficiency and collaboration. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of integrated communications that reflect a unified approach across the organisation to support local decision making. **We recommend that ORR discusses with National Highways how it effectively minimises internal silos and ensures consistent communications from the company to stakeholders, no matter the internal team or directorate. This would support internal efficiency and ensure that external communications are seamless and comprehensive.**

143. These measures are designed to address stakeholder needs for smoother cooperation and clearer communication, ultimately enhancing the collaborative relationship between National Highways and its stakeholders by integrating consistent, efficient, and transparent communication practices. This in turn will support the agenda for growth of the company and its stakeholders, supporting local communities and the strategic road network, and minimising bureaucracy and the burden that can come with it.