

Monitoring Highways England: *first consultation document*

19 June 2015

Consultation Response - preamble

ICE would like to thank the ORR for conducting this consultation on the monitoring of Highways England. ICE supports the shift to a longer term capital investment programme for the Strategic Roads Network (SRN) and welcome the development of performance indicators for the network and its assets.

The UK has mature and highly-developed transport infrastructure. These have supported a tripling of distance travelled since the late 1950s – overwhelmingly achieved through increased private motoring. The strategic road network is capacity-constrained at critical points, undermining its contribution to productivity, economic growth and quality of life.

Economic recovery and continued population growth may see a return to increased demand on the SRN. Therefore, ICE has argued in recent years that the Highways Agency, and now Highways England, requires a clear strategy for roads investment and performance, with a secure, long-term investment programme.

About the Institution of Civil Engineers

The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) is a UK-based international organisation with over 86,000 members ranging from professional civil engineers to students. It is an educational and qualifying body and has charitable status under UK law. Founded in 1818, ICE has become recognised worldwide for its excellence as a centre of learning, as a qualifying body and as a public voice for the profession.

Summary

In 2013, ICE called for immediate action to improve road conditions, planning and funding. Our State of the Nation report on transport provided the main recommendation that Government must move urgently to improve the performance of our economically vital roads network. We urged that it place its management and maintenance on a secure and cost effective footing by bringing forward long-delayed proposals for options for the future ownership and funding of the Strategic Roads Network (SRN) in England¹.

In recognition of this call, ICE welcomed the creation of Highways England as a Government-owned company (GoCo), which could:

- Create an asset performance-based approach to the management of the road network and provide separation from politically-led decision making;
- Establish a mechanism that secures longer-term, secured funding horizons of five years or more; and
- Create stronger accountability for the management of the SRN and delivery of the capacity in the network to support economic growth².

ICE welcomes ORR's revised role, which we agree is necessary to monitor how Highways England operates against the Performance Specification, Investment Plan and its licence.

ICE welcomes ORR's intention to:

- engage and receive advice from industry experts;
- benchmark performance; and,
- Align its role to the strategic objective of a long-term National Transport Strategy.

Our Transport Expert Panel has expressed willingness to support the ORR and offer their services to the Board's Highways Committee and the Roads Expert Panel to help provide the expert advice of the civil engineering community. We set out our response to the consultation questions below.

ICE response to consultation questions

1) *Are you clear what our role will involve? Are there aspects of our role, which you would like more clarity about?*

ICE understands what the ORR's monitoring, reporting and advisory role will involve and supports the action to consult and provide sufficient notice and clarification to Highways England.

2) *Do you agree with our strategic objective for our highways monitoring role?*

¹ ICE State of the Nation Transport (2013)

² ICE response to *Transforming the Highways Agency to a Government Owned Company* consultation (2013).

ICE supports the strategic objectives for both the rail and highways monitoring role. In doing so, ICE holds the long-term objective for the creation of a National Transport Strategy. Establishing the ORR in this highways monitoring role, alongside its rail responsibilities, could assist with the development of a National Transport Strategy to ensure alignment with other areas of transport. This could support the government's local devolution agenda in a strategic national context.

- 3) *Are there specific ways you would like us to engage with you beyond the industry forums already referred to in this document?*

ICE strongly agrees with the proposal for the board to form a Highways Committee and Roads Expert Panel. ICE would welcome the opportunity to support this initiative and provide expert advice from the civil engineering profession on the Board's *Highways Committee and Roads Expert Panel*.

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

Collaboration with local Highways Authorities will be essential. The local devolution agenda must be supported in a national strategic context. This should include the monitoring of economic growth related to investment and improvement of the strategic road network (for example, the criteria to clear for investment through the local growth funding in local transport).

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

ICE is satisfied that the information and analysis provided is sufficient.

- 6) *Is there specific information relating to Highways England which is not currently in the public domain which you think should be prioritised for publication?*

ICE is satisfied that sufficient information relating to Highways England is already in the public domain.