

# RESPONSE TO DFT AND NATIONAL HIGHWAYS INITIAL REPORT CONSULTATION

Details of Submission

5 July 2023

***Please note that the following recommendation/s is/are subject to consideration and determination by the Board before taking effect.***

## RECOMMENDATION

### It is recommended that:

- (a) The board approve the submission prepared for the DfT in response to their consultation on the National Highways Strategic Road Network (SRN) Initial Report on behalf of Peninsula Transport

### I. Background/Introduction

This note provides a proposed response to the DfT in relation to their consultation “Shaping the Future of England’s Strategic Roads” to feed into the third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3). The Consultation seeks views on the National Highways Initial Report. This report outlines National Highways’:

- view on the current state of the strategic road network (SRN)
- potential future needs
- proposed priorities for the next road period (RP3), covering the financial years 2025-26 to 2029-30

The Initial Report sets out National Highways’ understanding of what its customers want - a safe, reliable network, which supports net zero and better environmental outcomes, is integrated and customer focused. Having assessed the current state of its network and future trends, the report identifies the challenges that National Highways needs to address in the third road period and uses this insight to set out its plans.

The Strategic Objectives of the of RIS3 are:

- Growing the economy
- Improving safety for all
- Network Performance to meet customer needs
- A technology-enabled network
- Managing and planning the SRN for the future
- Improved environmental outcomes

A series of consultation questions are posed by the DfT on these objectives<sup>1</sup> and the Initial Report in detail, and the response proposed below follows the structure of these questions. The DfT has requested consultation responses to be received by July 13<sup>th</sup> 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/shaping-the-future-of-englands-strategic-roads/shaping-the-future-of-englands-strategic-roads#what-will-happen-next>

A further consultation process is being undertaken alongside this one by National Highways to gather view on the Connecting the Country Long Term Strategic Plan and the individual Route Strategy Initial Overview Reports. This consultation process closes on August 11<sup>th</sup> 2023.

## 2. Consultation Response

The response is structured to align with a series of themed questions posed in the consultation document.

### Strategic Objectives:

The initial question relates to the level of importance of the six RIS3 strategic objectives.

Peninsula Transport consider that all six of the objectives are very important.

*Growing the Economy* - The Peninsula is hugely reliant on the STB for connectivity to the wider economy, along with supporting tourism, which is central to the local economy.

*Improving Safety for All* - Improving safety on the SRN is considered to be the most important objective for Peninsula Transport. Of the 512km of network in the STB area, 26% is single carriageway, with the majority of this below standard. Significant sections of the SRN have junctions that are not grade-separated or allow crossing movements, even where dual carriageway. Sections of the SRN travel directly through communities creating safety and severance issues.

*Network Performance* – focusing this objective around the maintenance and renewal of the existing network is supported. Network performance is important for all users. In the Peninsula this performance is variable due to the inconsistent network which is put under particular pressure during peak seasons and periods. It is therefore important that this objective covers the improvement of the network where it is substandard as well as maintenance and renewal. The ‘legacy of inconsistent investment’ is highlighted in the Initial Report when identifying the priorities for the third road period<sup>2</sup>.

*A technology-enabled network* – whilst it is essential that technological advances and adapting the network to meet these is important, it is considered that greater use of the tried and tested technology available should be prioritised. In the peninsula, the significant influx of visitors during the summer months could be better managed through the improved use of existing technology and messaging to ensure the network operates as efficiently as possible and meets the demands of these seasonal fluctuations.

*Managing and planning the SRN of the future* – we agree it is important that the network is well maintained, due to the significance of the SRN as a proportion of the whole highway network in terms of the proportion of travel.

*Improved environmental outcomes* – addressing the decarbonisation of travel is very important. Peninsula Transport considers there should be greater emphasis in RIS3 on rolling out and installing the EV infrastructure to achieve this, enabling the capacity in place to facilitate a significant growth anticipated in alternatively fuelled vehicle types to achieve Net Zero.

### Trunking/de-trunking

There are no sections of the SRN within the Peninsula Transport area currently proposed for ‘trunking’ or ‘de-trunking’. Peninsula Transport agrees with these proposals.

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<sup>2</sup> Strategic Road Network Initial Report: 2025-2030 p.131.

However, the future cost of maintaining the Tamar Bridge, which in effect forms part of the Strategic Road Network, should be considered. Currently the cost of this is borne wholly by users and underwritten by Local Authorities.

### National Highways focus areas

Long Term Vision – Peninsula Transport supports the proposed focus areas set out within the Connecting the Country Report. In particular, Peninsula Transport supports the vision for Net Zero of National Highways’ activities by 2030 and the network users by 2050. However, the vision should include milestone objectives of what needs to be accomplished by 2030 in order to hit the 2050 target, particularly with regard to EV infrastructure. This would support the Peninsula Transport emerging strategy objective of developing EV infrastructure over coming years, which is particularly important to support longer distance visitors and business users.

### Improving safety on the network

Whilst safety is essential across the network, a particular area of high priority for Peninsula Transport is achieving a consistent SRN across the whole area. For example, sections of our network continue to have crossovers, at-grade junctions and single carriageway links such as the A38, A303 and A35. These parts of the network inevitably have a poorer safety record than those built to more modern safety standards.

### Making the best use of the existing Strategic Road Network

Peninsula Transport supports the priority of making the most of the existing network, and aligns well with the emerging Peninsula Transport Strategy. The focus of maintaining the existing network with more limited expansion over the next RIS period is understood given current budget and programme constraints.

### Community Offer and Designated Funds

Improving customer information, in particular realtime, is supported by Peninsula Transport. Making use of existing technology and messaging to ensure the network operates as efficiently as possible and meets the demands of customers is essential where significant capacity enhancements are not likely to come forward.

Peninsula Transport will support a more collaborative approach to identifying needs for and allocation of designated funds across our area. In particular, supporting the ability for users to transfer to alternative modes where most appropriate through improved information and infrastructure aligns with our transport strategy’s objective of achieving an integrated transport network for the peninsula.

### Decarbonisation and Environmental Sustainability

The Initial Report sets out a proposal of rolling out 2,500 open access rapid charging points across the network by 2030, funded by the governments Rapid Charging Fund from the Office for Zero Emissions. This pace of rollout does not appear to match the demand forecasts for this time period. Detail of the provision within RIS3 to further expand this rollout of EV infrastructure investment should be provided. Peninsula Transport are concerned this proposed expansion will not create the capacity to support the growth in electric vehicles forecast over the RIS3 period.

### Taking a targeted approach

Peninsula Transport supports the third road period priority of improving safety on single carriageways and other ‘A’ roads, addressing the ‘legacy of inconsistent investment’ in our network. As detailed earlier, the inconsistent nature of the SRN within the peninsula area is a particular concern.

The increased focus on smaller schemes is welcomed, however it should be clarified whether the budget envelope is sufficient, given the cost of delivering improvements on the strategic road network. This budget needs to be informed by practical examples and consideration given to what role local bodies (STBs and Local Authorities) can play in driving efficiency and delivery.

### Measuring our Performance

Performance needs to be monitored against milestones set with regard to achieving Net Zero. They should be customer focused and outward looking rather than focused upon internal NH operations. The metrics should be able to monitor the changes required in order to get to Net Zero on the SRN.

### Meeting the needs of people affected by the presence or operation of the SRN

Across the Peninsula Transport area, there are a number of locations where the SRN has a direct negative impact upon the local population through severance and proximity to the network. It is important that NH are proactive in addressing these issues and exploring approaches to alleviating the impacts on residents who live along the SRN.

### Digital Technology

As detailed above, Peninsula Transport would support the use of existing proven technology to influence the pattern of demand on the network through better information and messaging in the short term.

### Other Issues

The lack of an indicative Statement of Funds Available (SoFA) means that there is limited visibility of future budgets. This will make developing and feeding into the programme for RIS3 difficult. The lack of funding information will make the prioritisation process for STBs very difficult to undertake in a meaningful way. If it is the intention to encourage a 'bottom up' approach to scheme and programme development then this may lead to unrealistic expectations amongst stakeholders.

## **3. Financial Considerations**

This paper does not impact directly upon the finances and programme of the STB.

## **4. Environmental Impact Considerations**

There are no specific environmental considerations.

## **5. Legal Considerations**

There are no specific legal considerations.

## **6. Risk Management Considerations**

There are no direct risks associated with this paper.

## **7. Public Health Impact**

There are no public health impacts

## **8. Summary**

This note represents the proposed consultation response on behalf of Peninsula Transport and has been prepared following a number of briefing and consultation sessions with National Highways.