



## ORR Road Expert Panel meeting

21 October 2021, 1000 to 1200

Microsoft Teams Meeting

### Agenda

1000 to 1005	Welcome, setup and declarations of interest
1005 to 1015	Update from the Highways Team
<b>1015 to 1025</b>	<b>Paper 1 – Progress on Previous Papers</b>
<b>1025 to 1050</b>	<b>Paper 2 – Zero Carbon</b>
<b>1050 to 1115</b>	<b>Paper 3 – Reflecting on the Annual Assessment of Highways England 2020-21</b>
1115 to 1120	Break
<b>1120 to 1145</b>	<b>Paper 4 – Feedback from the Panel</b>
1145 to 1200	AOB

## **Welcome and declarations of interest**

All Panel members were present. Harry Garnham, Head of Performance, welcomed everyone to the panel.

Sneha Patel, the new Deputy Director for Highways was introduced to the panel.

No declarations of interests were reported.

## **Update from the Highways Team**

In February 2021 the Highways Team presented the RIS3 Efficiency Review. The panel provided comments on ORR's proposed approach to the Review and ORR has since prepared a RIS3 approach document to put out for consultation in the autumn. The document and the approach were approved by ORR's Highways Committee and Board. ORR provided a slide to the panel that covered off the key themes.

ORR flagged that a lot of time was spent unpacking the aims of the approach document and we were keen for it to follow DfT's "planning ahead" publication that would set the wider policy scene.

Also, on RIS3, ORR had commissioned work on some of the processes behind National Highway's renewals and enhancements planning and was in the process of commissioning an environmentally focused horizon scan to draw on later in the process.

On 18 October the Highways Team put out an escalation and regulatory work consultancy package. This was seeking support to improve ORR's ability to compare processes across regulated industries, to drive better outcomes from National Highways through ORR's escalation and regulation processes and produce a Monitoring Handbook, which will set out the Highways Team's processes and ways of working.

In July 2021 the Highways Team presented to the panel on its Stakeholder Engagement Plan. The Team fed back that the panel's insights and comments on this were useful. ORR took account of them in drafting and were now working to the new plan. Building on comments about engaging with devolved and international bodies, ORR has also been talking to TRL, the Welsh, Scots and Dutch about comparing road / pavement condition.

In July 2021 ORR published its annual assessment, which concluded several smart motorway items. There was a commission from the Secretary of State, asking for data assurance for assessing risks on smart motorways; this coincided with an internal piece of work looking at how ORR monitors the action plan, primarily around the safety aspects of the plan.

There were changes to the change controls for the enhancements programme, including Stonehenge and the Lower Thames Crossing, and other tier 1 programmes with planning permission issues or concerns.

Going forwards, a significant amount of work is tied to the upcoming Spending Review, to understand the impact of any outcomes.

## **Zero Carbon**

ORR requested feedback from the panel on National Highways' plan for net zero highways. In particular, ORR wanted to know the panel's general thoughts on the plans, what was strong and what was weak, and whether the plan was sufficiently forward looking.

Broadly, the panel thought that the plan looked reasonably good and contained strong headlines and ambitions. However, some panel members noted that the many aspects read as aspirational goals rather than outcomes for a plan, especially for later years.

The panel identified several areas that the plan could expand on, including.

- The impact on National Highways' supply chain management;
- Milestones for electrical charging;
- Incentives for electric vehicles; and
- Emissions for tires and brakes.

The panel discussed the frequency at which the plan would need to be updated. It was agreed that the plans needed clear review points, and that ORR should have a role in pushing National Highways on its delivery of its Zero Carbon plans.

## **Reflecting on ORR's Annual Assessment of Highways England's performance in 2020-21**

The Highways Team reminded the panel of its previous advice and reflections on the draft key messages for the annual assessment, at the March 2021 panel meeting.

The panel provided feedback on the published annual assessment, with the consensus that the assessment contained the appropriate tone and analysis for a year one report.

The panel then discussed what areas ORR could expand in its annual reporting of National Highways. One suggestion was that ORR could increase its reporting on safety metrics. It was agreed that ORR should consider the additional areas that it could influence within its annual assessment, should they fall under areas of ORR's influence (set out in the licence).

## **Feedback from the Panel**

Before concluding the final meeting of this Road Expert Panel, the Highways Team thanked the panel members for their work over the past two years and invited them to provide feedback on their experience of being on the panel.

Overall, the panel said that broadly expectations for the role had been met, and that the panel meetings covered a suitable range of topics.

The panel discussed areas in which the panel could be improved. Some panel members said that the remit of the panel could have been clearer, and that the Highways Team should communicate the outcomes of items raised, so that the panel can better understand the impact of advice given. It was also proposed that the panel could have a greater influence by providing advice to ORR beyond the panel meetings.

There was a discussion on the organisation of the meetings, and it was agreed that there would be benefits to extending the meetings, should they be held face-to-face.

The Highways Team noted that the recruitment for the new Road Expert Panel was underway and invited applications from the current members.

## **AOB**

A member of the Highways Team reminded panel members that ORR was consulting on its Sustainable Development Policy, and asked that any views be provided by the closing date on 9 November 2021.