



# Transport Activists' Roundtable

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## North West

[www.nwtar.org.uk](http://www.nwtar.org.uk)

Mr. Richard Coates,  
Head of Highways Monitor Development,  
Office of Rail & Road,  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, One Kemble Street,  
London, W2BAN.

Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Dear Mr. Coates

### **Response to 'Monitoring Highways England' – first consultation document**

Both the **North West Transport Roundtable (NW TAR)** and the **Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)** North West Regional Group have been represented on the Highways Agency's Northern Region Environmental Committee (REC) from its inception over 15 years ago to the present day. We are hopeful that the REC, which amalgamated with the Northern Road Users Committee (RUC) a few years ago, will continue under 'Highways England'.

For information, NW TAR is an umbrella organisation which promotes sustainable transport and land use and healthier lives. We operate under the auspices of the Campaign for Better Transport (CfBT). CPRE works to protect and enhance towns and countryside to make them better places to live, work and enjoy. It espouses the ethos of 'Smart Growth' which, amongst other things, seeks to direct new infrastructure to previously developed land.

CPRE, CfBT and NW TAR believe the government should develop policies that reduce the number of car journeys rather than providing more road space and would like to see better transport choices, safer roads - especially for walkers and cyclists - and a revitalisation of bus services and the rail system. This being the case, we have all been critical of what we believe to be a misguided return to road-building on a grand scale which we maintain is unsustainable.

We would argue that sustainable transport improvements and smart choices ought to be delivered first in order to achieve modal shift. Better spatial planning would reduce the need to travel and new roads, widened ones and hard-shoulder running on motorways should only be delivered as a last resort after all else fails and if a very sound case can be made.

Although that is our perspective, we have always worked constructively with Highways England's predecessor because we focus on policy and on trying to make it better. We therefore welcome the ambition of the Office of Road and Rail (ORR) to build constructive working relationships with wider stakeholders (paragraph 22) and would like to be included in all your consultative events.

### **Views sought by the first consultation document**

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

A.1 We would like you to spell out what legal measures are open to you if Highways England fails to “deliver better environmental outcomes” which, as paragraph 8 in the consultation document explains, is one of its five declared outcomes. For instance, what measures the ORR would take if Highways England contravenes the 2008 Climate Change Act.

Q.2 *Do you agree with our strategic objectives for our highways monitoring role?*

A.2 The interpretation of “delivering better environmental outcomes” is far too limited. It is seen in Table 3.22 as only relating to biodiversity and noise (in the short term). It should relate to the Climate Change Act and all the environmental criteria covered by the New Approach to Appraisal (NATA) and Appraisal Summary Tables (ASTs) including air quality.

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

A.3 The list of ‘industry forums’ quoted in paragraph 5.4 of the consultation document does not include either the national or the regional equivalents of the Highways Agency’s environmental committees. These have been very useful and fruitful bi-lateral fora for many years. They should be continued in a similar vein under Highways England.

Q.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?*

A.4 Only two environmental criteria have been flagged up for immediate attention – biodiversity and noise. It is imperative that the other environmental factors included in appraisal summary tables are monitored from the outset, ie. local air quality, greenhouse gases, landscape, townscape, heritage of historic resources and water environment. We understand that there is an intention to introduce monitoring criteria in respect of air quality and carbon emissions by 2020 but this delay is not acceptable – particularly in the face of the Supreme Court ruling of April 29<sup>th</sup> this year on Client Earth’s case against the government with regard to its failure to meet legal limits on air pollution. The Supreme Court Justices called for immediate action from the government. (This comes on top of the legally binding carbon budgets that were introduced as part of the Climate Change Act in order to help the UK reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050).

We would also point out that Highways England’s Business Plan acknowledges: *“There continue to be significant areas of poor air quality alongside the network and adjoining roads which exceed the UK and EU standards”* (page 13). This is followed by commitments to improve monitoring, support and promote research and to *“support schemes that bring about positive benefits for local residents and the wider environment”* (page 14).

Further, under the side heading of ‘Improved Environment’ the Business Plan recognises: *“Road transport contributes significantly to the nation’s greenhouse gas emissions. Air quality, noise, biodiversity, the wider landscape, flooding and water quality are all environmental issues that are affected by the network”* (page 35).

*Q.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?*

A.5 Following on from our response to Q.4, we believe it is crucial that the ORR produces regular air quality reports and analyses. Also, we would make the point that not all the Key Performance Indicators currently have targets set against them.

Most importantly, the ORR should consider the efficiency of outcomes and not simply the efficiency of outputs because the danger is that it could potentially make a priority of keeping down road-building costs at the expense of environmental mitigation. It should also have the ability to promote alternative measures such as smarter choices.

*Q.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?*

A.6 Following the Supreme Court ruling referred to in A.4, the ORR should be calling on Highways England and the DfT to produce a comprehensive plan to meet pollution limits as soon as possible and, once this has been produced, it should be holding Highways England and the DfT to their plan(s).

We trust that these comments are useful.

Yours sincerely,

**LILLIAN BURNS**, Convenor, NW TAR/ Deputy Chairman, CPRE North West Regional Group