

# Review of National policy statement for national networks

In 2019, our roads handled 88% of all passenger travel by distance, the vast majority of it by car or van. Even doubling rail use across the country would only reduce this proportion to 75%, assuming that overall demand did not rise. The roads also carry more than three-quarters of freight traffic, and of course nearly all pedestrian, cycling, bus and coach journeys.

Continued high investment in our roads is, therefore, and will remain, as necessary as ever to ensure the functioning of the nation and to reduce the congestion which is a major source of carbon. Almost half of our [£27 billion programme for England's strategic roads](#), though often described as for road-building or capacity expansion is, in fact, for renewing, maintaining and operating the existing network or for funds to improve safety and biodiversity, deliver active travel schemes and tackle noise or pollution.

In the coming years, our ambitious and accelerating plans to decarbonise all road traffic will transform roads' impact on greenhouse gas emissions. We have always said, however, that we must ensure the road network meets today's demands, not those of the past.

In the last 18 months, fundamental changes have occurred in commuting, shopping and business travel which, before the pandemic, made up 30% of all road journeys by distance and a much higher proportion at the times and places of greatest pressure.

Trends already underway in homeworking, online shopping and videoconferencing, all of which had reduced trip rates even before the pandemic, have dramatically increased and seem unlikely to be fully reversed. Against that, though, must be set the effects on road demand of the hopefully temporary move away from public transport during the crisis; of increases in delivery traffic; and potentially of increases in driving when electric and autonomous vehicles become common.

The current [National policy statement \(NPS\) on national networks](#), the government's statement of strategic planning policy for major road and rail schemes, was written in 2014 – before the government's legal commitment to net zero, the [10 point plan for a green industrial revolution](#), the new [sixth carbon budget](#) and most directly the new, more ambitious policies outlined in the [transport decarbonisation plan](#).

While the NPS continues to remain in force, it is right that we review it in the light of these developments and update forecasts on which it is based to reflect more recent, post-pandemic conditions, once they are known.

The aim is to begin the review later this year and for it to be completed no later than spring 2023. This review will include a thorough examination of the modelling and forecasts that support the statement of need for

development and the environmental, safety, resilience and local community considerations that planning decisions must take into account.

Reviewing the NPS will ensure that it remains fit for purpose in supporting the government's commitments for appropriate development of infrastructure for road, rail, and strategic rail freight interchanges.

While the review is undertaken, the NPS remains relevant government policy and has effect for the purposes of the [Planning Act 2008](#). The NPS will, therefore, continue to provide a proper basis on which the Planning Inspectorate can examine, and the Secretary of State for Transport can make decisions on, applications for development consent.