

Road reform continues to deliver for road users and taxpayers, says new report

The government's reform programme, which began in 2014/15, has delivered better value for money for taxpayers, led to more efficient planning of road maintenance and upgrades and provided greater confidence for the supply chain, the report said.

The changes involved the move from the Highways Agency to Highways England (now National Highways), a government-owned company. It was accompanied by a five-year funding deal to allow for better planning for the ongoing work to maintain the strategic road network (SRN) – motorways and major A-roads.

This was supported by a threefold increase in investment into the network, which rose to £4.5 billion per annum, as well as new monitoring and watchdog roles overseen by the Office of Rail and Road and Transport Focus.

Ipsos Mori and Risk Solution have evaluated the reforms through a series of reports published in 2016 and 2019.

Today, the third and final evaluation is published drawing on interviews with external stakeholders, suppliers and road user groups, as well as reviews of National Highways' work.

The changes were designed to improve road users' experience, provide value for money to taxpayers and support growth through facilitating quicker and more efficient journeys across the country.

Overall, today's report says that the reforms "have been effective in improving how the SRN is managed, and that they have had positive effects on value for money and road users' experience". It has also led to significant efficiency savings being made, it says.

The introduction of five-year Road Investment Strategies has provided National Highways with greater funding certainty over longer periods, leading to increased reliability and flexibility regarding project delivery and supplier procurement.

Nick Harris, Chief Executive at National Highways, said:

Having secure long-term investment in place has made an enormous difference to the way we operate, allowing us to be more strategic and innovative in our management of the network and in our relationships with our stakeholders.

Ultimately our focus is on ensuring that the strategic road network is as safe and secure as possible, and greater financial security

means we have more freedom in considering the best methods of supporting that approach and our customers.

The report said that:

National Highways has made £1.45 billion of efficiency savings in the first five years compared with a target of £1.21 billion. This was in the context of significant growth within the organisation and delivering a much-expanded programme of work.

- Stakeholders believed the changes had allowed National Highways to “identify and focus on the most important long-term priorities rather than frequently switching between issues attracting attention at a particular time, and has more scope to consider what will be needed in future”;
- The move away from the Highways Agency to an independent government-owned company had led to “better consideration of the needs and experiences of its customers”, including those people and organisations using the SRN as well as communities near the network;
- The funding certainty had, interviewees said, “led to more stability in the enhancement programme with fewer projects being cancelled at short notice, and better planning and coordination of work”;
- There was greater certainty for suppliers through the use of longer-term contracts and contracting directly with smaller suppliers, resulting in “greater efficiency in the management of the SRN”;
- The increased confidence was thought to have encouraged the supply chain to “invest in capabilities and infrastructure, and improve ways of working through innovation”;
- The creation of formal highways monitor and watchdog roles has led to National Highways having greater accountability and focus on customer and outcome-based performance.

The evaluation comes as National Highways publishes its latest efficiency report. The company is continuing to reach its targets on delivering better value for money for the taxpayer, with a cumulative year two efficiency milestone of £471 million reached.

View the [Evaluation of Roads Reform report](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the National Highways customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the National Highways press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.