

Highways England first year progress report on smart motorways stocktake

The House will know that this government takes the safety of our roads very seriously and has invested heavily in improvements to help prevent deaths and injuries. Great Britain has some of the safest roads in the world and, although per hundred million miles driven there are fewer deaths on smart motorways than conventional ones, we are determined to do all we can to help drivers feel safer and be safer on our roads – all our roads.

In March 2020, I published a [Smart motorway safety evidence stocktake and action plan](#). The safety improvements in the 2020 action plan consisted of a package of 18 actions, costing £500 million, including the rollout of radar-based stopped vehicle detection (SVD) technology across the All Lane Running (ALR) motorway network and an additional £5 million on national and targeted communications campaigns to ensure drivers receive advice to help them keep safe.

Furthermore, we have changed the law to enable automatic detection of vehicles driving in closed lanes, known as red X violations. Highways England is upgrading all enforcement cameras across the smart motorway network to enable automatic detection of red X violations which can then be enforced by the police.

One year on from the publications of the 2020 action plan, I commissioned a report from Highways England which sets out its progress on these 18 actions along with proposals about how those actions could be accelerated.

Today (20 April 2021), Highways England has published its Smart motorways stocktake first year progress report 2021. The report contains the latest safety data which updates analysis contained in the 2020 Stocktake report.

The report demonstrates significant progress against the 18 actions, which when delivered in full, will raise the bar on motorway safety.

Over the past 12 months, Highways England has:

- launched a major road safety campaign to give drivers clear advice about what to do in the event of breaking down
- completed work to turn emergency areas orange so they are more visible to drivers and improved the signage letting drivers know how far they are from the next place to stop in an emergency
- installed 10 more emergency areas on the M25 around London
- held a public [consultation on proposed changes to the Highway Code](#) that will provide more information about motorway driving
- continued to upgrade cameras so they can automatically detect red X violations
- introduced radar-based stopped vehicle detection technology on stretches of the M3 and the M20, with work underway on the M1

Highways England is now accelerating a number of actions so that the completion dates set out in [Highways England: Strategic Business Plan 2020-25](#) are brought forward.

Most significantly, radar-based stopped vehicle detection technology will now be installed on all operational ALR motorways by September 2022, 6 months earlier than planned.

Highways England has also made a commitment that no ALR motorways will open without radar technology to spot stopped vehicles, enable lanes to be closed where necessary and get help to drivers quickly.

The data contained in the Highways England progress report continues to show that fatal casualties are less likely on all lane running motorways than on conventional ones, but we know drivers can feel less safe on roads without hard shoulders, which is why the progress report, published today, intends to accelerate a number of actions to provide reassurance to drivers.

[My statement of 24 March 2021](#) confirmed that the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) is carrying out an independent review of the data to provide further analytical assurance and ensure that the conclusions arrived at are robust.

I would like to pay tribute to all those safety campaigners, in particular those who have lost loved ones, on their efforts to ensure that changes are made. The government and Highways England will continue to work hard to improve road safety.

- Measures to boost safety on All Lane Running motorways accelerated press notice, 20 April 2021
- Quality assurance for All Lane Running motorways, letter from the Secretary of State for Transport to Office of Rail and Road

[Hebden Bridge flood warning siren test](#)

Press release

A flood warning siren will be sounded in Hebden Bridge as a test between 2 and 3pm this Thursday 22 April.



The site of the flood warning siren at Hebden Bridge

The test is taking place due to the replacement of the siren at the Vale Centre site on Stubbing Holme Road. The siren test will last for two minutes.

Christian Merriman, Environment Agency flood risk advisor for Calderdale said:

The new siren is being moved approximately 10 metres from its existing location because of work on a wall as part of the Hebden Bridge Flood Alleviation Scheme. The siren is being tested to ensure it is working effectively in its new position.

Residents and businesses do not need to take any action when the sirens sound during the testing but the siren should be treated seriously if sounded at any other time.

With an audibility level similar to that used by emergency vehicles, the Environment Agency uses the sirens to warn people of possible imminent flooding from the River Calder that runs through the town.

The sirens help the community be as prepared as possible for any risk of flooding.

Staff from the Environment Agency and BAM Nuttall will be in the area to provide advice and answer questions on Thursday. Residents and business owners can ask any questions by emailing HebdenBridgeFAS@environment-agency.gov.uk.

To find out if your property is at risk of flooding, sign up to flood warnings and find out how to put together a flood plan for your home or business, call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or visit www.gov.uk/flood.

For the latest information on current flood warnings Hebden Bridge residents can follow [@EnvAgencyYNE](https://twitter.com/EnvAgencyYNE) on Twitter.

For more about the Hebden Bridge Flood Alleviation Scheme please visit [Eye On Calderdale – Hebden Bridge Flood Alleviation Scheme](#).

Minister for Equalities' speech on the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities' report

Mr Deputy Speaker, with permission, I would like to make a statement about our work to examine inequality across the population. And set out a new, positive agenda for change.

This government is committed to building a fairer Britain and taking the action needed to promote equality and opportunity for all.

We do however recognise that serious disparities exist across our society. And we are determined to take the action that is required to address them.

Following the events of last summer, our nation has engaged in a serious examination of the issue of race inequality and this Government has been determined to respond by carefully examining the evidence and data. We need to recognise progress where it has been made. But we also need to tackle barriers where they remain.

That was why last summer, the Prime Minister established the independent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities.

It was tasked with informing our national conversation on race by carrying out a deeper examination of why disparities exist and considering how we can reduce them.

And after careful study, the Commission made evidence-based recommendations for action across government, the private sector and other public bodies.

The Commission was established with ten experts drawn from a variety of fields spanning science, education, economics, broadcasting, medicine and policing. And with one exception, all are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The Chair, Dr Sewell, has dedicated his life to education and to supporting young people from socially deprived backgrounds to reach their full potential.

This distinguished group was tasked with reviewing inequality in the UK, and they focused on education, employment, crime and policing, and health.

As this House will be aware, on March 31st the Commission published its independent report and I will now turn to its findings.

It is right to say that the picture painted by this report is complex –

particularly in comparison with the way issues of race are often presented.

The report shows that disparities do persist – that racism and discrimination remain a factor in shaping people’s life outcomes. And it is clear about the fact that abhorrent racist attitudes continue in society, within institutions, and, increasingly, online. It calls for action to tackle this.

However, the report also points out that while disparities between ethnic groups exist across numerous areas, many factors other than racism are often the root cause. Among these are geography, deprivation, and family structure. For example, a Black Caribbean child is ten times more likely than an Indian child to grow up in a lone parent household.

And disparities exist in different directions. People from South Asian and Chinese ethnic groups have better outcomes than the white population in more than half of the top 25 causes of premature death.

The report also highlights the progress Britain has made in tackling racism.

And the report’s data reveals a range of success stories.

For example, it underlines the significant progress achieved in educational attainment, with most ethnic minority groups now outperforming their white British peers at GCSE level.

The report also delves into the causes and drivers for some of the most persistent and enduring issues. For example, the Commissioners identified the disproportionate rate of young black men convicted of class B drug offences.

Let me be clear, the report does not deny that institutional racism exists in the UK. Rather, the report did not find conclusive evidence of it in the specific areas it examined. It reaffirms the Macpherson report’s definition of the term but argues it should be applied more carefully and always based on evidence.

The Commission made 24 evidence-based and practical recommendations. These have been grouped into four broad themes: to build trust; promote fairness; create agency; and to achieve inclusivity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, there are many things that unite this House: a shared commitment to making Britain fairer for everyone, is one of them. In light of this fact, I urge Hon and Rt Hon members to make the time to read its 258 pages.

There is also another thing which I am sure unites this House, which is abhorrence at the appalling abuse meted out to the Commissioners and the false assertions made about their work in the last three weeks.

It is true that this landmark analysis challenges a number of strongly held beliefs about the extent and influence of racism in Britain today.

The Commissioners have followed the evidence and drawn conclusions which challenge orthodoxy and they were prepared for robust and constructive

debate.

However, they were not prepared for the wilful misrepresentation of the report which occurred following its publication.

Such as false accusations that they denied that racism exists or that they wish to put a positive spin on the atrocities of slavery.

Or false statements that Commission members did not read or sign off on their own report – or that they are ‘breaking ranks’.

I have been informed by the Chair and by individual members that the Commission remains united and stands by their report.

This Government welcomes legitimate disagreement and debate but firmly rejects bad faith attempts to undermine the credibility of this report. Doing so risks undermining the vital work we are trying to do to understand and address the causes of inequality in the UK – and any of the positive work that results from it.

For that reason, it is necessary to set the record straight.

This report makes clear the UK is not a post-racial society and that racism is still a real force which has the power to deny opportunity and painfully disrupt lives.

That is why the very first recommendation of the Commission is to challenge racist and discriminatory actions. The report calls on the Government to increase funding to the Equality and Human Rights Commission to make greater use of its compliance, enforcement, and litigation powers to challenge practices or policies that cause unjust racial disadvantage or arise from racial discrimination.

The Government even more firmly condemns the deeply personal and racialised attacks against the Commissioners – which have included death threats. [Political content].

An example of the very online racial hatred and abuse on which the report itself recommended more action be taken by Government.

It is of course to be expected that Hon and Rt. Hon members will disagree about how to address racial inequality and the kinds of policies the government should enact.

However, it is wrong to accuse those who argue for a different approach as being ‘racism deniers’ or ‘race traitors’. It is even more irresponsible – dangerously so – to call ethnic minority people racial slurs like ‘Uncle Toms’, ‘Coconuts’, ‘House slaves or House Negroes’ for daring to think differently.

Such deplorable tactics are designed to intimidate ethnic minority people from their right to express legitimate views.

This House depends on robust debate and diversity of thought. Too many ethnic minority people have to put up with this shameful treatment every day, as some of my fellow MPs and I know too well. This House should condemn it and reprimand those who continue to do so.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Commissioners' experience since publication only reinforces the need for informed debate on race based on mutual respect and a nuanced understanding of the evidence.

The Government will now consider this report in detail and assess the next steps for future government policy. In recognition of the extensive scope of recommendations, the Prime Minister has established a new Inter Ministerial Group to review recommendations.

It will ensure action is taken to continue progress to create a fairer society.

As Sponsoring Minister, I will provide strategic direction with support from my officials in the Race Disparity Unit. The group will be chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

So, on that note, on behalf of the Prime Minister, I would like to thank once again the Commissioners for all they have done.

They have generously volunteered their time, unpaid, to lead this important piece of work. And the Government welcomes their thoughtful, balanced and evidence-based findings and analysis.

The Government will now work at pace to produce a response to the report this summer.

Let me assure the House that it will be ambitious about tackling negative disparities where they persist and building on successes.

And it will play a significant part in this government's mission to level up and unite the country and ensure equality and opportunity for all, whatever your race, ethnicity or socio-economic background.

I commend this statement to the House.

Civil news: work with the Process Efficiency Team

News story

Improving processes at the Legal Aid Agency can be something that providers

of legal aid can all have a hand in developing through our consultative group.



The Process Efficiency Team (PET) is a small group made up of legal aid providers, representative bodies, and subject matter experts from across the Legal Aid Agency (LAA).

This group was established in 2019 with the aims of:

- developing a partnership approach between the LAA and providers
- providing representative bodies with a forum to raise operational process and communications issues on behalf of their members
- providing a collaborative space for the LAA and representative bodies to work through any operational process or communications issues
- provide a forum for the LAA to consult representative bodies on any external facing business improvement activity and seek their input

PET was initially focused on family work but has recently widened its scope to include housing, legal help, very high cost family work, and Court of Protection work.

The format of PET has also recently changed so that the group meet once every two months with a focused workshop in between. The subject matter of the focused workshop is decided by PET.

How is it different to the Civil Contract Consultative Group (CCCG)?

PET focuses on improvements to operational processes based on existing policy. All members understand that it is not the right forum to suggest changes to policy and are keen to influence operational processes that can be changed.

How can I get involved?

We want to ensure PET is as representative as possible and would like to encourage as diverse a membership from across the legal sector as possible.

Improvements to a process, without committing to join PET, can also be suggested via the email below.

If you would like to get involved please email: PETQueries@justice.gov.uk.

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[Surveillance Camera Commissioner responses to the Department for Transport consultation on taxis](#)

The Department for Transport [ran a public consultation in early 2019](#). It invited respondents to submit their views on the measures proposed in the draft Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle (PHV) Standards.

In April 2019, the then [Surveillance Camera Commissioner Tony Porter responded to the consultation](#), focusing on the guidance in relation to proposals for blanket licencing requirement for CCTV in taxis.

In July 2020 the Department for Transport published the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards. These include a number of standards that taxi and PHV licensing authorities are expected to implement. The standards also state that all licensing authorities should undertake a consultation on in-vehicle CCTV in taxis and PHVs.

[A public consultation ran in early 2021](#) seeking views on whether the installation of CCTV in vehicles would have either a positive or adverse effect on the safety of taxi and PHV users, including children or vulnerable adults, taking into account potential privacy issues.

In March 2021 the [Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner Fraser Sampson responded to the consultation](#), focusing on achieving a fair balance of intrusion and interference against the general principles which arise from enshrined human rights and legitimate expectations.