



Measuring Highways England's performance 2020-25:

the road user view
February 2019

Foreword

It is important that road users' priorities are reflected in the Road Investment Strategy Performance Specification that the Department for Transport (DfT) will set for Highways England from 2020.

Transport Focus and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) have worked together to understand how road users think performance should be measured and where targets are needed.

What follows is a summary of road users' views, including those of drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. It is supplemented by a full research report, which sets out in detail what users think about each component of the possible specification.

There is general endorsement for the spread of possible measures, and consensus that a safe, well-maintained network delivering reliable journey times matters most. Users want to see

targets set in several areas, including safety, road condition and information.

Findings from this research have been shared with the DfT and Highways England to inform their thinking. Transport Focus and the ORR will use the insight in their respective roles in the process leading to Government publishing its final strategy for 2020-25.

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Introduction

The DfT is developing a Performance Specification that will set out what Government wishes Highways England to achieve between 2020 and 2025. This work has already been informed by a first phase of research into what users want to see measured, also a joint initiative between Transport Focus and the Office of Rail and Road, published in 2017¹.

This report sets out the findings of a second phase of research, again with a wide range of road users, to understand the extent to which emerging thinking about

the Performance Specification meets their needs.

The Performance Specification is likely to be structured around six themes – the ‘outcome areas’ set out by the DfT in its Draft Road Investment Strategy 2, published on 29 October 2018². Road users were asked to consider the importance they attached to each theme, and presented with a range of possible measures of performance within each one. Users were asked which of the measures they felt should have targets for Highways England to achieve. The table below shows the ‘outcome areas’, and the possible measures presented to road users in the research.

Outcome areas

Improving safety for all	Providing fast and reliable journeys	A well-maintained and resilient network	Being environmentally responsible	Meeting the needs of all users	Achieving efficient delivery
Road user safety (killed and seriously injured)	Average delay	Road condition	Biodiversity	User satisfaction	Spending on capital and operations
Vulnerable road user safety	Journey time reliability	Drainage condition	Noise	Accuracy and timeliness of roadworks information	Construction progress
Total collisions	Effective operation of smart motorways	Structures condition	Carbon impact of Highways England's activities	Quality of information to road users	Value for money
Highways England and supply chain safety: accident frequency rate	Delay in roadworks	Technology condition	User emissions	Logistics sector satisfaction	
Road safety rating of network	Incident response	Geotechnical condition	Air quality on the Strategic Road Network	Vulnerable user satisfaction	
Total casualties	Accuracy and timeliness of information to local highway authorities	Ride quality from a user perspective	Cultural heritage		
	Delay on gateway routes		Litter		
	Average speed				

¹ <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/measuring-performance-englands-strategic-roads-users-want/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-road-investment-strategy-2-government-objectives>

Key findings

The research shows that roads users think all six themes are important, but ‘safety’, ‘a well-maintained and resilient network’, and ‘fast and reliable journeys’ are the three highest priorities for all. These are seen as fundamental for meeting the

needs of Highways England’s customers. Road users recognised each of the measures as relevant to the theme in question, although some were seen as more important than others.

Improving safety for all

"If you can't get there safely, what's the point of getting there at all?"

Non-motorised road user, 28-37, Norwich

"I'm using the roads every day for work and I want to be safe on the roads."

Business driver, 41+, Slough

A well-maintained and resilient network

"This is the number one without question, if you fix the roads, everything else will fall out from that. Fix the roads, they become safer, so you get faster and more reliable journeys, and more satisfied users. So this one is at the top."

Professional driver, 37-58, Northampton

Providing fast and reliable journeys

"Reliable journeys are more important than fast, so you can know how long journeys take and plan ahead."

Commuter, 21-40, York

Most important themes and measures

Top tier priorities – consistently higher priority than other themes

Safety

- Killed and seriously injured
- Vulnerable user safety
- Total casualties
- Total collisions

Well-maintained network

- Road condition
- Drainage condition
- Structures condition
- Technology condition
- Ride quality from user perspective

Second tier priorities

Fast and reliable journeys

- Journey time reliability
- Operation of smart motorways
- Delay in roadworks
- Average speed

Meeting all users' needs

- Accuracy and timeliness of roadworks information
- Quality of information

Lowest priorities

Efficient delivery

- Spending on capital and operations
- Construction progress

Environment

- Air quality on the Strategic Road Network
- Litter

Setting targets – what do road users want?

The research shows that road users think it would be appropriate to set targets for certain aspects under each theme, and that regional targets would be more helpful than either national or local ones. Participants felt national targets would be too broad and lack meaning in the context of the roads they use, whereas local targets risked Highways England being bogged down in too much detail.

There is considerable agreement across all types of road user, including professional drivers, business drivers and non-motorists, but priorities vary based on individual needs and requirements. The measures listed on the right were identified as a result of road users considering what affects them most. For example, 'being environmentally responsible' emerges as a higher priority for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians, than it is for drivers. Therefore, monitoring a range of aspects in each theme, with targets where appropriate, is a good approach for ensuring that Highways England's performance meets all users' needs. The Office of Rail and Road's monitoring approach puts equal store on the performance of metrics with targets as on those without targets.

Findings from the first phase of research in 2017 identified 'signage and information' as a key area. In this second phase, many of the issues road users raised related to how Highways England communicates, and they ranked these as high priorities, particularly professional and business drivers. Good communication provides road users with a sense of control over their journey. This is an area where

Transport Focus and the Office of Rail and Road are currently working with Highways England to better understand what road users want from the company when it comes to information.

Theme	Measures that road users think should have targets attached
Improving safety for all	'Number of people killed or seriously injured' or 'Total casualties'
A well-maintained and resilient network	'Road condition'
Providing fast and reliable journeys	'Effective operation of smart motorways' 'Delay in roadworks'
Meeting the needs of all users	'Accuracy and timeliness of roadworks information' 'Quality of information to road users'
Being environmentally responsible	'Air quality on the SRN' 'Litter'
Achieving efficient delivery	'Spending on capital and operations' 'Construction progress'





What happens next?

Findings from this research have been shared with the Department for Transport and Highways England, and are helping to shape the Performance Specification that will take effect on 1 April 2020. Ultimately, it is for Government to determine what it requires of Highways England and how stretching individual targets should be.



How was this research carried out

This qualitative research mirrored the methodology used in the first phase. First, priorities were identified for all six overarching themes within the possible Performance Specification, as well as measures related to each theme. Then, road users identified the measures that should have targets and explained why.

Transport Focus carried out 35 mini focus groups (three road users per group) and seven depth interviews, split uniformly across each of the seven Highways England regions, in summer 2018. This involved those who drive for a living (such as HGV drivers), those who drive for business or leisure, and those travelling to or from work, across a range of ages. Cyclists, pedestrian and equestrian users of the Highways England network also took part. The depth interviews were with disabled drivers, novice drivers and older drivers. In total, Transport Focus spoke to 112 road users.

Through a further eight depth interviews, the views of businesses that are particularly dependent on Highways England's roads (for example the freight, bus/coach and postal/courier industries) were also captured.

The research agency's full report can be downloaded at <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/measuring-highways-englands-performance-2020-25-the-road-user-view>

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