



OFFICE OF   
RAIL AND ROAD

# Annual Assessment of Highways England's Performance

April 2020 to March 2021



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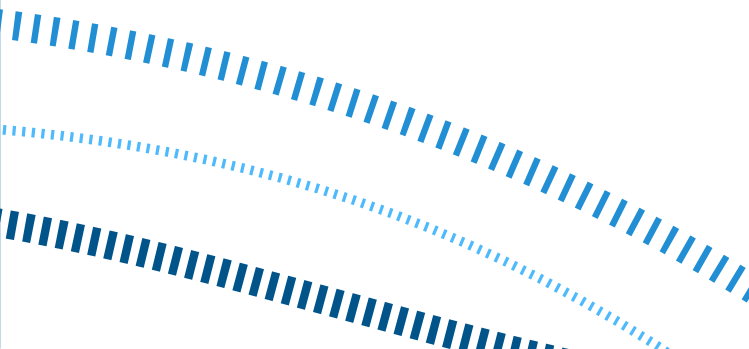
# About ORR

**The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) is the independent safety and economic regulator for Britain's railways and monitor of Highways England.**

We protect the interests of rail and road users. We are improving the safety, value and performance of railways and roads, today and in the future.

Highways England was set up as a government-owned company in 2015, tasked with managing the strategic road network – the motorways and major A-roads of England. In its second road investment strategy (RIS2) the government specified a set of outcomes and investments that it requires Highways England to deliver over road period 2 (RP2), from April 2020 to March 2025.

ORR independently monitors Highways England's delivery of the requirements set out in the RIS. Our Annual Assessment sets out our view of Highways England's performance in 2020-21.



# Foreword

by John Larkinson  
Chief Executive



Over the past year Highways England has faced a set of extraordinary circumstances, unprecedented in its short life. We as the Highways Monitor have also faced our own challenges as to how we hold Highways England to account for its performance and weigh the effects of those extraordinary circumstances on future benchmarking.

Highways England responded well to the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the end of the transition period for the UK's exit from the EU in December 2020. We credit it with keeping the network open for the smooth flow of essential goods and people around the country. It met its key performance targets, albeit in some circumstances with unusually favourable conditions caused by the decline in traffic that accompanied pandemic-related lockdowns.

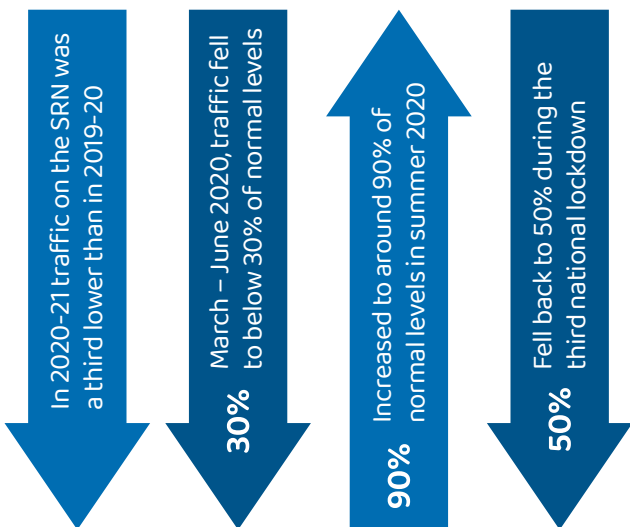
Whilst Highways England has almost certainly met its safety target for 2020, it knows that it must maintain a laser-like focus on road safety. We expect it to deliver on the safety-focused changes to the all lane running motorway programme mandated by the Department for Transport.

On capital enhancements and programme delivery, the evidence shows that Highways England has performed satisfactorily over the past year. However, we are concerned about the future delivery of the RIS2 enhancement portfolio. We have already seen schemes moving further along in the road period and into the next as well as some significant underspends. We are concerned that this demonstrates a lack of appropriate capability in the planning and risk management of the portfolio on the part of Highways England. Delays to delivery of these schemes also threatens Highways England's efficiency and wider performance targets. We formally escalated this matter with the company and expect it to take significant steps to mitigate our concerns at the next spending review.

# Extraordinary circumstances

Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and the end of the transition for the UK's exit from the EU.

Highways England performed well against its key performance indicators in 2020-21. Some targets were less challenging due to reduced levels of traffic on the Strategic Road Network (SRN).



**6.7**

seconds

Lower average delay

**98%**

Network availability

Target 97.5%

**88.6%**

Incident clearance

Target 86%

Road user satisfaction measures and delivery were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**80%**

Overall journey experience rated a 'very good' or 'fairly good'



**54.5%**

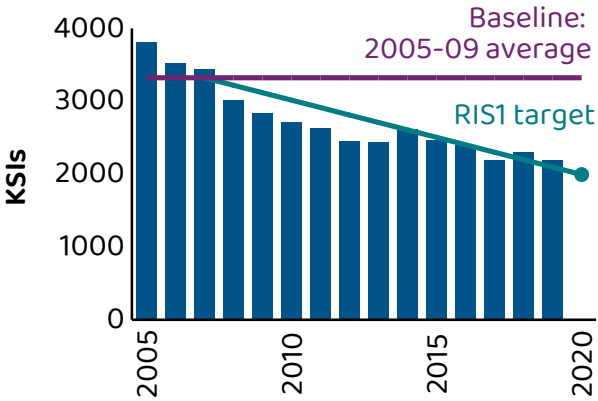
Accuracy of roadworks information across 2020-21, with a significant in-year improvement



# Road safety

Highways England maintained a strong focus on delivering safety improvements to the network. But there is more to do.

In 2019 people killed or seriously injured on the SRN were 34% below the baseline; reduced traffic due to the COVID-19 pandemic means we expect the target 40% will be achieved by 2020.



Highways England delivered its 2020-21 requirements in the safety-focused Smart Motorway Action Plan. It completed all eight actions on time. Delivery of the remaining tasks will be challenging.



# Delivery and risk to RIS2 KPIs performance

Highways England delivered its commitments on enhancement schemes and the majority of its renewals commitments in 2020-21.

Highways England successfully met its revised 2020-21 start of work commitments, starting work on five schemes – one 6 months head of schedule and one brought forward from 2021-22 – and opened three enhancement schemes for traffic in 2020-21, one more than was committed.

However, the RIS2 enhancements portfolio is complex and contains risks, including underspends, to the successful delivery of the remaining RIS2 commitments in full, with potential knock-on impacts for road users. The key risks are:

- **MORE** large, complex schemes such as the Lower Thames Crossing and the A303 Stonehenge
- **MORE** schemes requiring Development Consent Orders
- **MORE** smart motorways scope
- **MORE** concurrent construction



A large number of schemes at the development stage. Risk of work bunching together in the final years of the road period with knock-on impacts for road users.

