

Sustainable development plan 2012 - 15

Review March 2014

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Introduction

This report is a review of the Highways Agency's progress against the nine performance aspects set out in its [Sustainable Development Plan 2012-2015](#).

The nine performance aspects sit within three main principles which are: a sustainable Highways Agency; working with society; and future challenges.

The plan represents the latest step on our journey to attempt to become a truly sustainable organisation. The Agency and the strategic road network play an important part in supporting economic progress and the network also interacts with the environment and wider society.

It is part of our ambition to make all these interactions positive or at least balanced and this is what drives our approach to sustainable development. We want to contribute to positive progress towards economic, environmental and social goals for the good of national prosperity.

As an organisation we can be rightly proud of the steps we have taken, over years, towards making sustainability an important consideration across a wide range of our activities. Our plan seeks to build on our past achievements and go further to mainstream sustainability into the organisation. This means we aim to embed the consideration of economic, environmental and social factors into every process and operation we manage, as well as into the corporate culture of our organisation.

We want to play our part in delivering a fair, healthy, safe and prosperous society and valuing our environment both for the services it provides and for its intrinsic value and contribution to national wellbeing.

Our plan is intended to support our corporate strategic vision to be the world's leading road operator by:

- strengthening our contribution to a sustainable transport system
- supporting national economic recovery
- meeting the diverse needs of all our customers
- promoting national wellbeing
- continuing to develop our sustainable approach.

In short we are aiming to make sustainability business as usual, when we do what we do and we do it sustainably.

1 A sustainable Highways Agency

1.1 What does being a sustainable Highways Agency mean?

Mainstreaming sustainability is everyone's business, in both the Agency and our supply chain. Sustainability is not optional. It is central to our programmes, projects and day jobs – a key part of our decision making and delivery.

“Operating our network more effectively lies at the heart of greater sustainability. Our road network must function smoothly to support national economic recovery, we must meet the diverse needs of all our customers to promote national wellbeing, and we must continue to develop our sustainable approach.”

“We will choose the right solutions at the right locations, which are deliverable, affordable and provide value for money.”

The Highways Agency's Strategic Plan 2010 -15

From the start of anything we do, we should first ensure that we are satisfied that the intervention is needed. If it is, we should make sure we have the lowest possible negative impact on the environment and society and where possible make positive improvements to wellbeing and quality of life. The early stages of projects are often when key choices regarding function, design, use of materials and impacts on the end user are made – we need to ensure that beneficial outcomes are integral from this stage onwards.

There are three performance aspects that underpin the principle to be a sustainable Highways Agency:

1. Managing our impacts

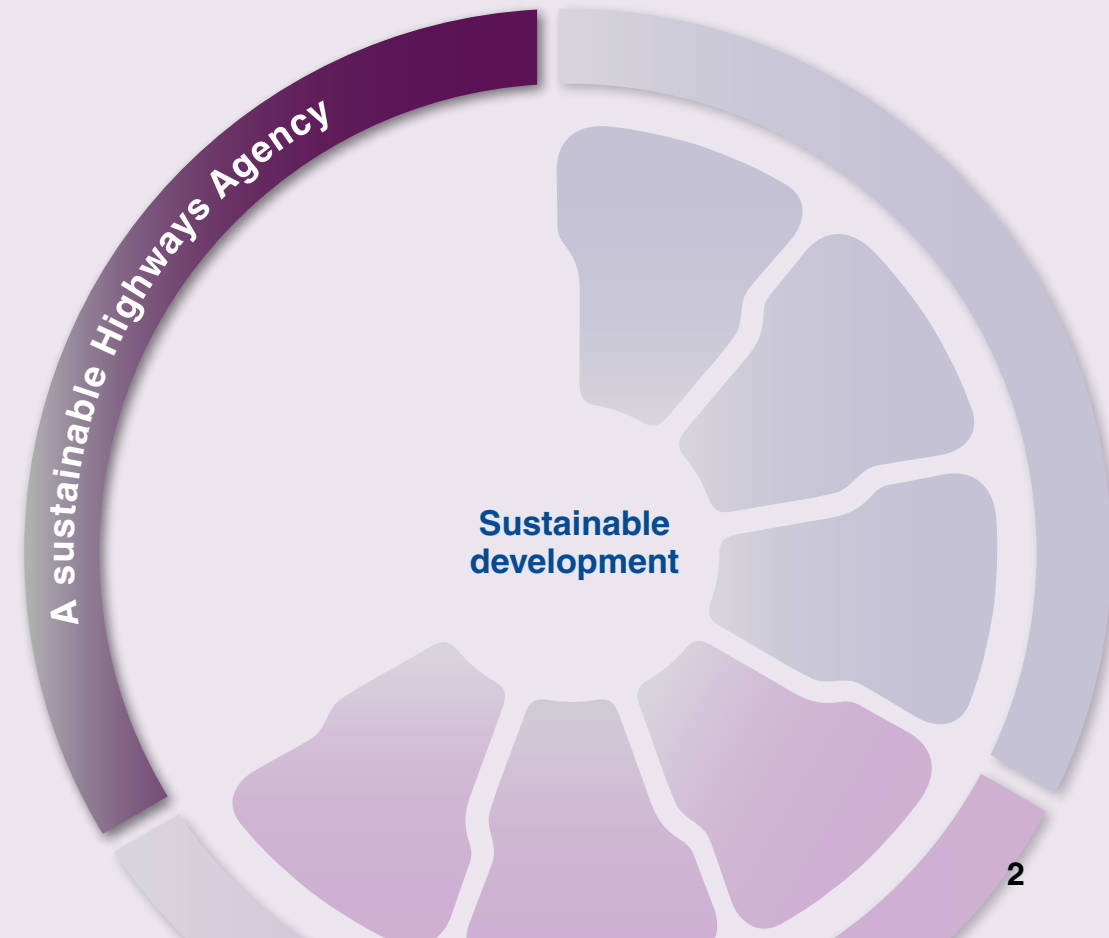
Be a low footprint organisation, both in the services we deliver and in our workplace behaviours.

2. Taking ownership

Be recognised as a leading organisation for our sustainable approach.

3. Adding value

Maximise economic benefits while also delivering enhanced social and environmental outcomes.



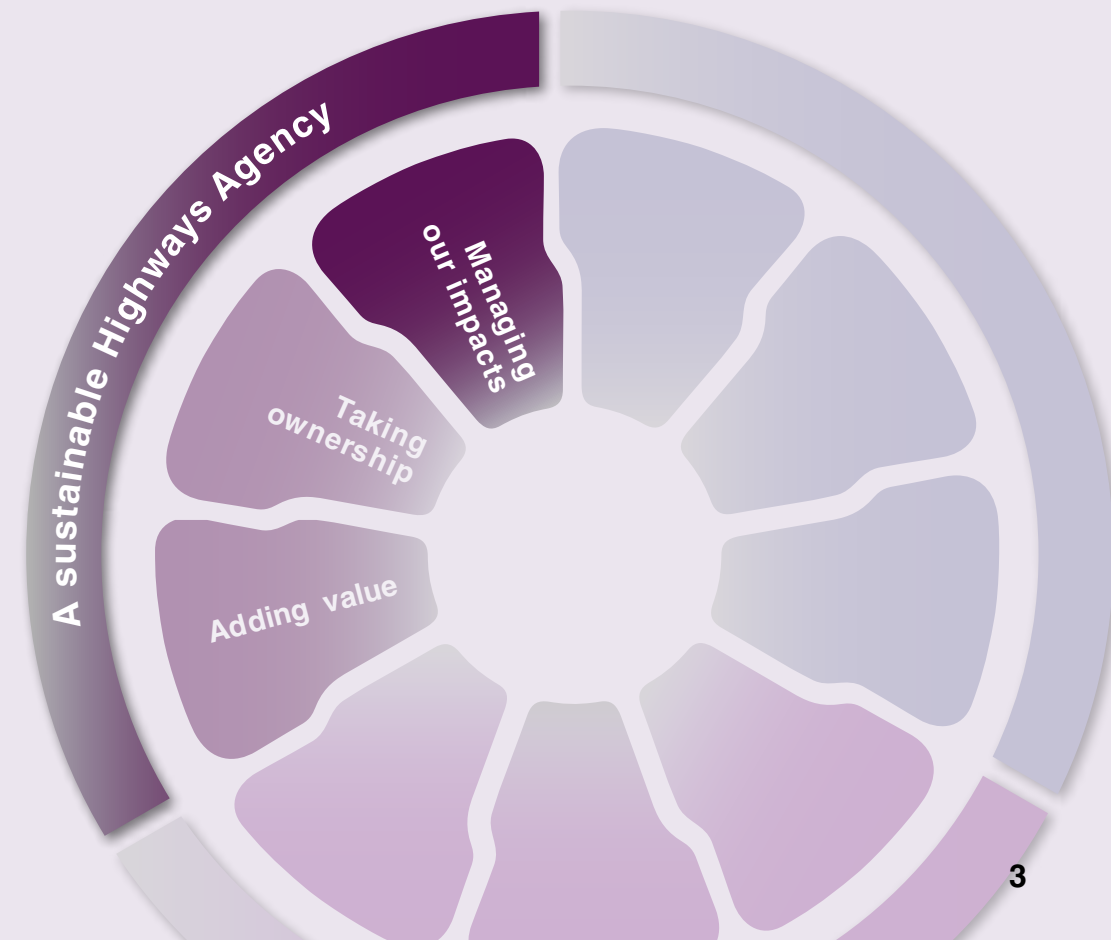
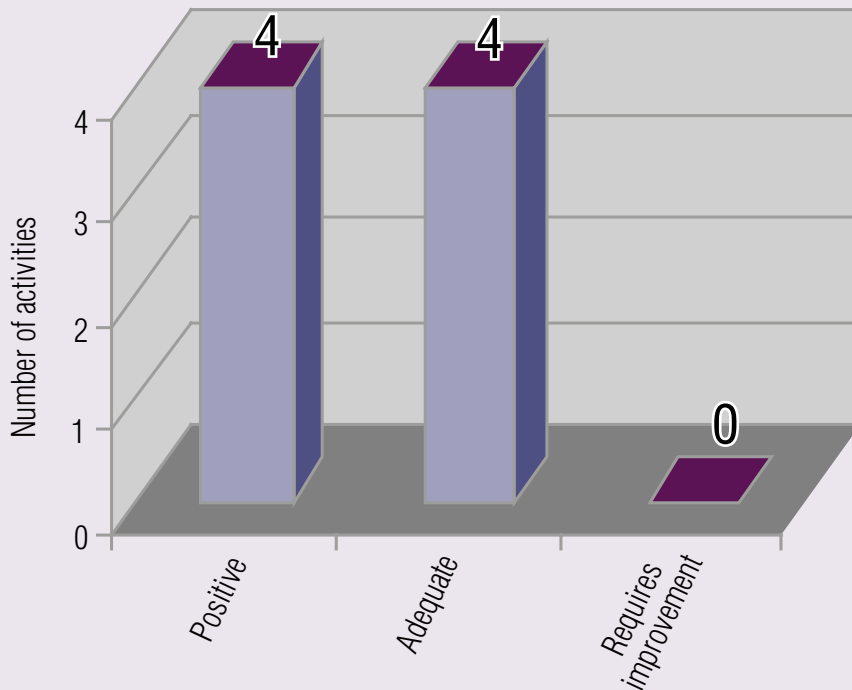
1.2 How are we doing at being a sustainable Highways Agency?

1.2.1 Managing our impacts

To be a low footprint organisation, both in the services we deliver and in our workplace behaviours.

It is important for us to recognise where and how our work impacts on the environment or society, and to seek to lower our footprint in terms of environmental and social impact. This is recognised throughout government and it is no surprise, therefore, that seven of the eight measures in this section are mandated as part of the greening government commitments. We also report on these regularly through our corporate performance report which is a further indication of the progress we have already made in integrating sustainability into corporate processes. We have been recognised independently for our success in this regard by winning a PricewaterhouseCoopers National Audit Office Building Public Trust award for sustainability reporting for the second year running in 2012. We are making positive progress in four measures and adequate in the other four.

Managing our impacts

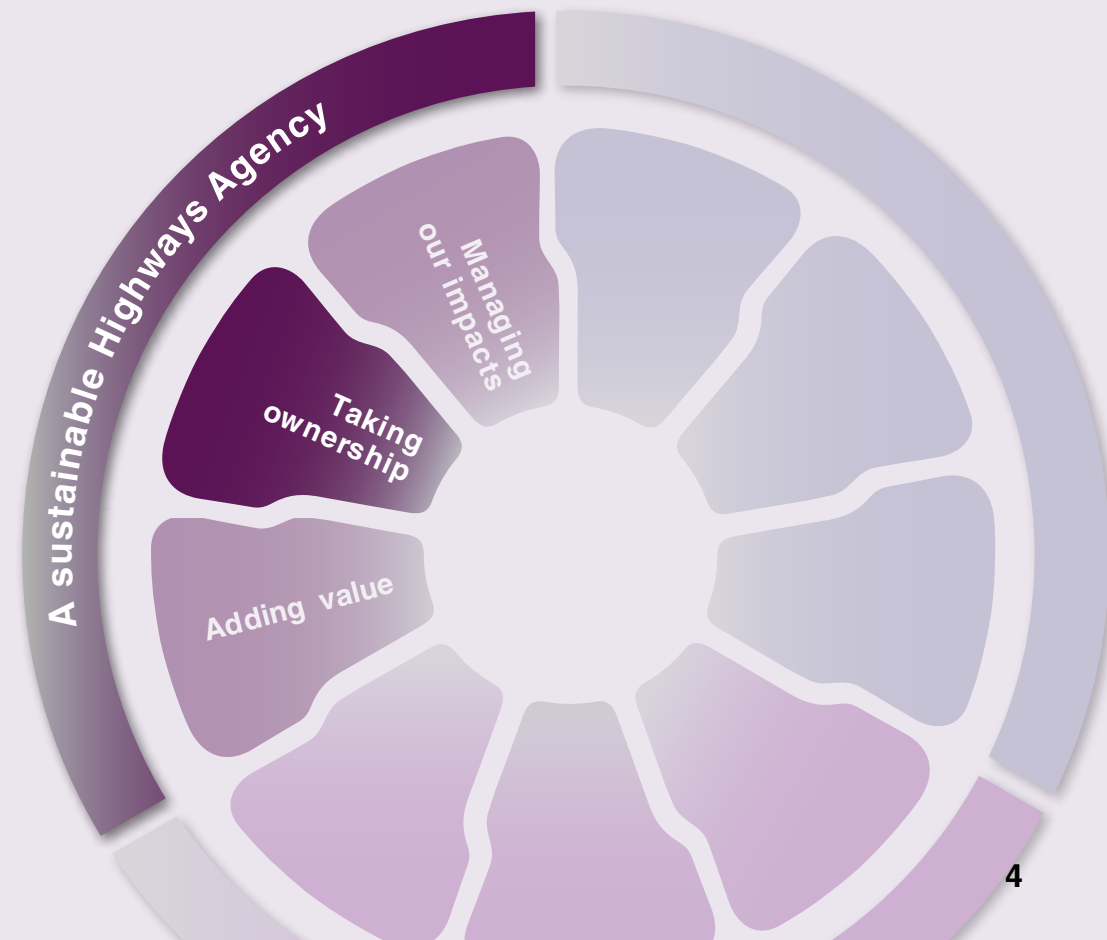


How are we doing at being a sustainable Highways Agency?

1.2.2 Taking ownership

To be recognised as a leading organisation for our sustainable approach.

This goes to the heart of what we are trying to achieve through our plan and is fundamental to the corporate and cultural embedment of sustainability. As such, many of the measures we have in place will have a long gestation period. That said, in the two years of our plan, out of the seven measures under this aim, we consider progress to be positive in four and adequate in three.

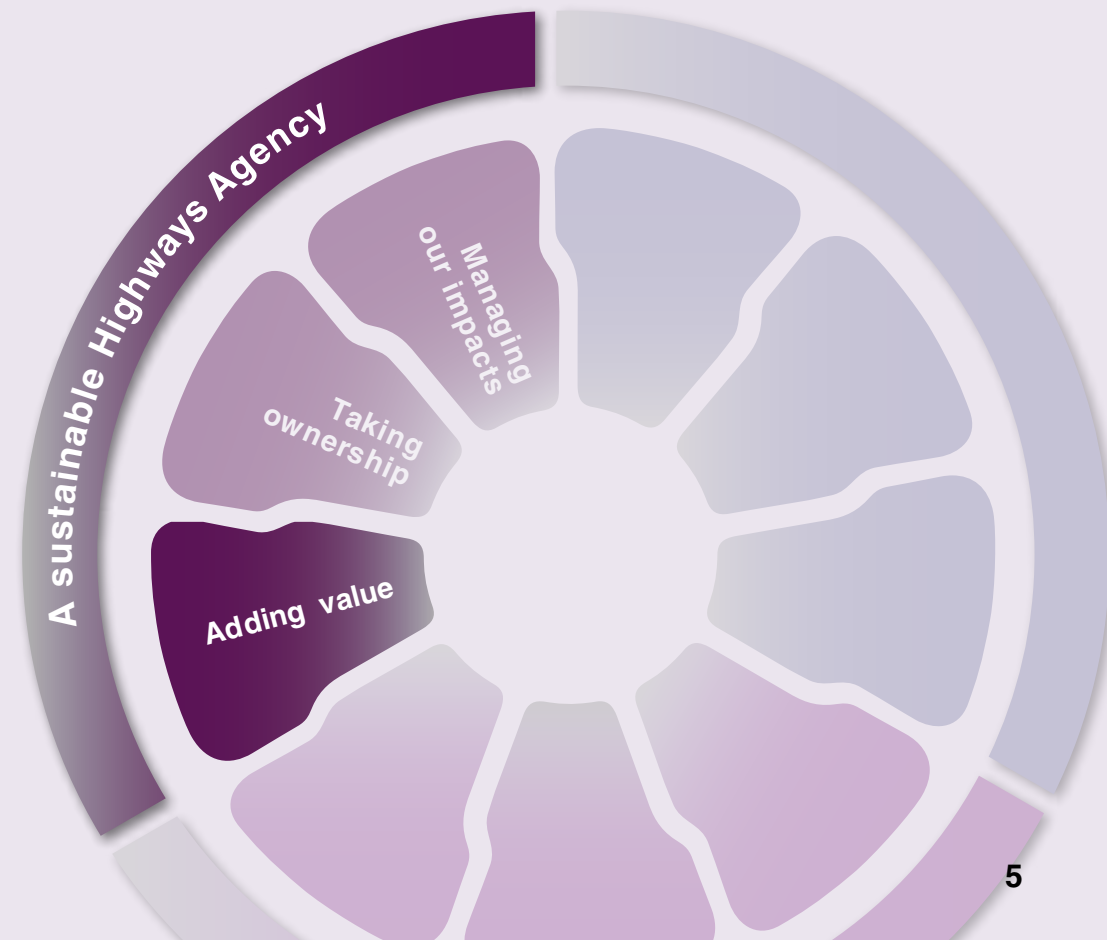
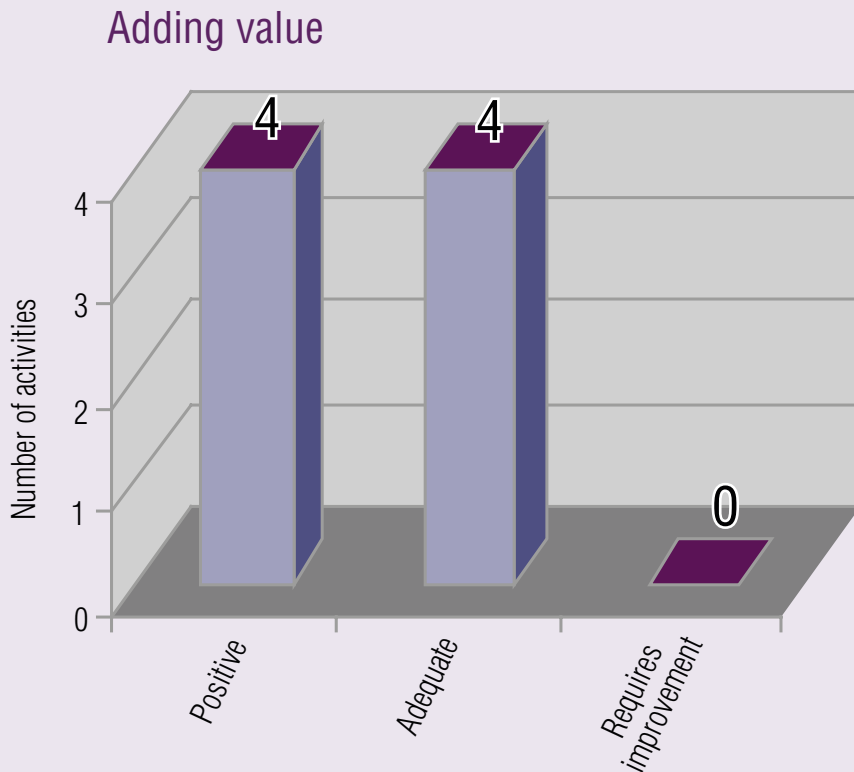


How are we doing at being a sustainable Highways Agency?

1.2.3 Adding value

To maximise economic benefits while also delivering enhanced social and environmental outcomes.

There is a clear and established rationale for the economic benefits the strategic road network supports. We are also justified in drawing attention to the benefits the network brings to connect people to goods and services, places of work and leisure. On the other side of the coin there is all too often a conflict, with damage to local environments and to the health and wellbeing of communities neighbouring our network. We do not shy away from acknowledging that a prosperous society is the primary driver for our management and improvement of the network. Progress has been good in this area; out of eight original measures, progress looks positive in four and adequate in the other four. One of the measures is not being reported further as it is business as usual.



1.3

Highlights and concerns - *a sustainable Highways Agency*

We have agreed an approach to validate current procurement performance against the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) sustainable procurement criteria. This review is currently subject to correspondence with the Department for Transport (DfT) to determine whether the review is to be a 'stand-alone exercise' for the Agency or part of a Department for Transport-wide exercise.

The Agency continues to be very good at celebrating sustainable achievements by staff and suppliers. In addition to our internal award schemes and success at external award ceremonies, with our suppliers, our intranet provides an ideal platform to celebrate achievement, through regular news stories.

Progress is being made with regard to embedding sustainability as a core part of regular staff appraisal. This is complemented by the new civil service competency framework, which embeds consideration of environmental and social effects in decision making.

2 Working with society

2.1 What is *working with society* about?

The need to address major issues such as climate change, congestion and the environmental impacts of roads is collectively 'owned' by many different stakeholders. The solutions to these issues will only come from shared understanding, integrated planning and co-operative working.

To contribute to a fair society and play our part in enabling equality of opportunity, we will ensure that at the forefront of our planning and decision making we will consider the needs of:

- road users
- communities (and their environment)
- people who work for us (Agency staff, our suppliers and their supply chain)
- the requirements of the public sector equality duty.

"Our customer base is large and diverse. About four million customers use our network every day, relying on our roads to arrive at work, to have goods delivered to their front doors and their local supermarket, or for visiting friends and relatives, and travelling to holiday destinations.

"We will challenge complacency about road safety, by encouraging our road users to make positive safety choices for themselves and others, and adopting a vision of zero tolerance to incidents involving our staff and our contractors."

Highways Agency Strategic Plan 2010 -15

The working with society principle is underpinned by three performance aspects which contribute to how we interact and work with society:

- 1. Responsive processes and standards**
Deliver sustainable and equitable outcomes.
- 2. Understanding wider impacts**
Make positive impacts on quality of life for those using our network and those affected by it.
- 3. Strong working partnerships**
Agree common sustainability goals with major suppliers.



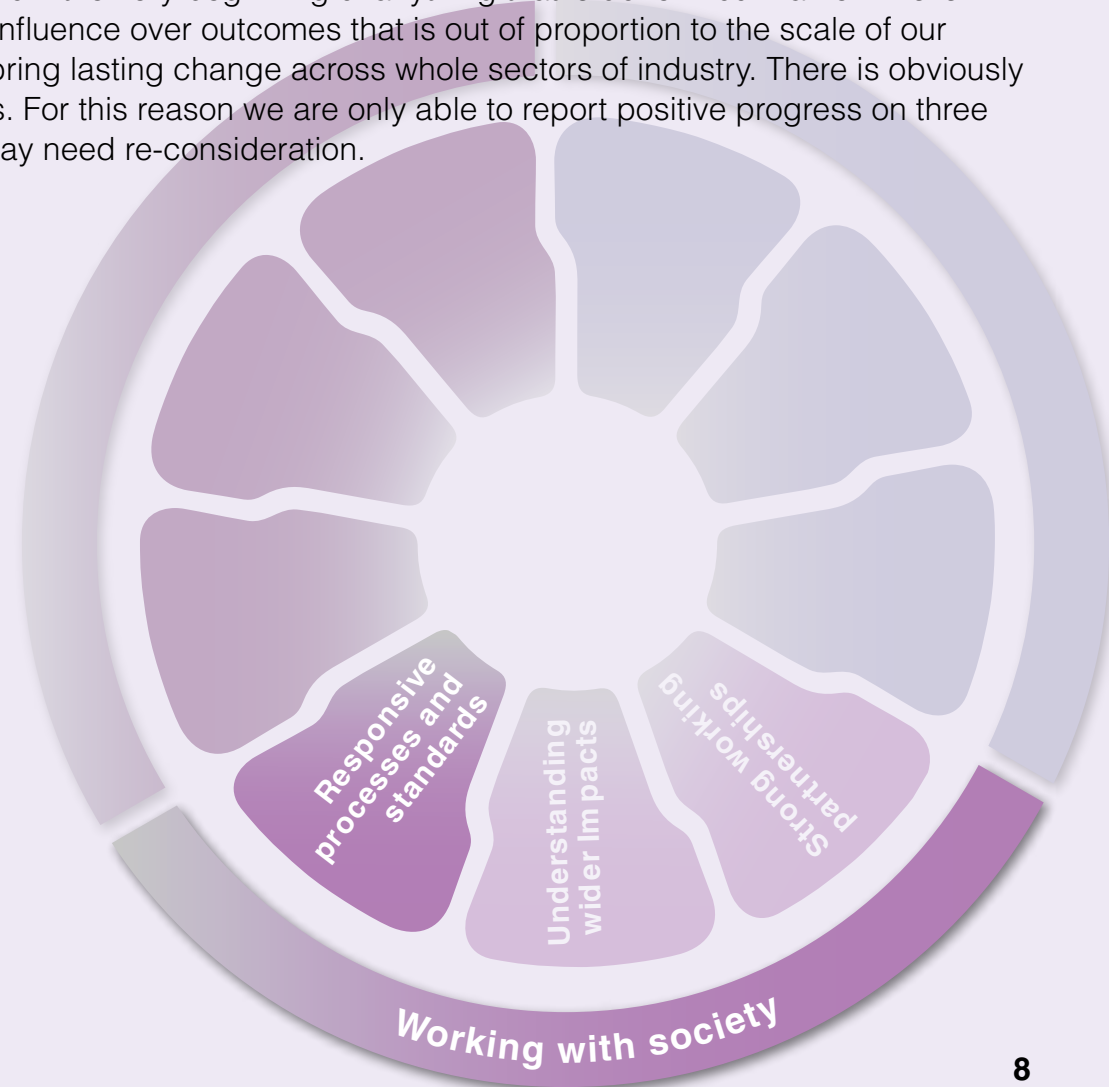
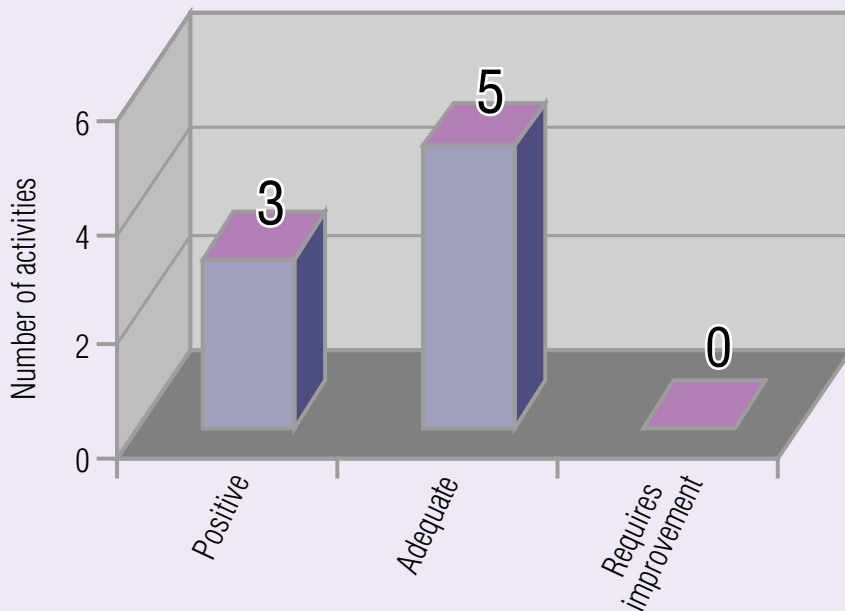
2.2 How are we doing with *working with society*?

2.2.1 Responsive processes and standards

To deliver sustainable and equitable outcomes.

In delivering our services we lean heavily on our expertise in developing standards and processes, and procuring goods and services. We therefore have the opportunity to ensure that we address sustainability from the very beginning of anything that is done in our name. This is a powerful position to be in and perhaps bestows upon us a degree of influence over outcomes that is out of proportion to the scale of our organisation. This can stretch beyond the project level and be used to bring lasting change across whole sectors of industry. There is obviously quite a long lead time in many cases to revise processes and standards. For this reason we are only able to report positive progress on three activities, and are adequate on five, with one not yet progressing and may need re-consideration.

Responsive processes and standards



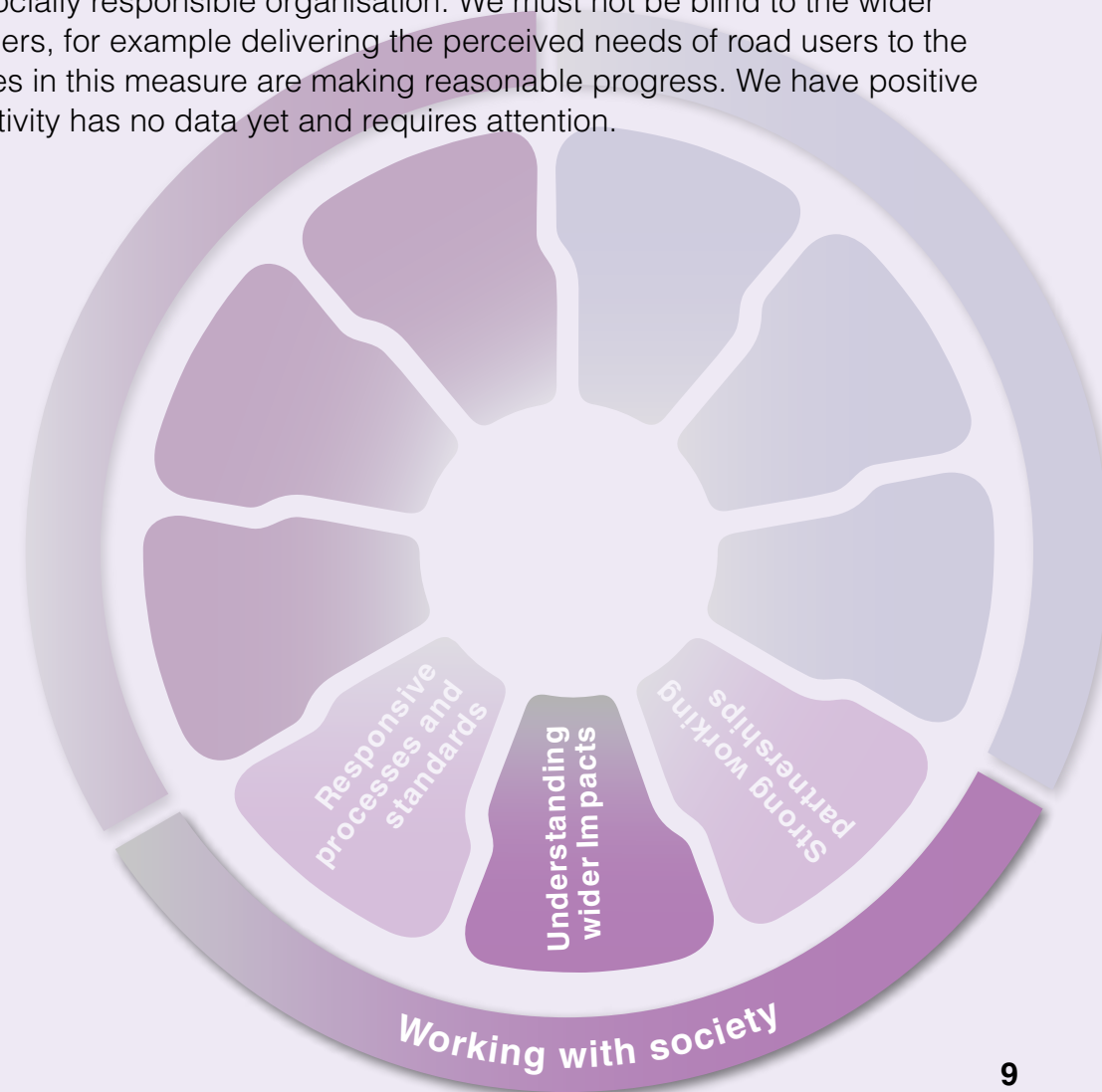
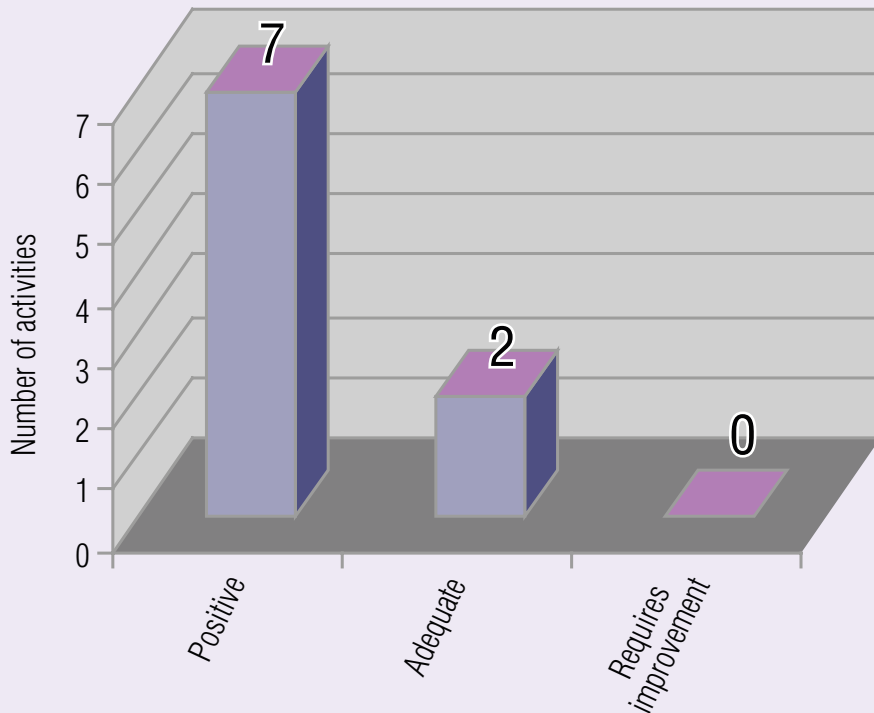
How are we doing with *working with society*?

2.2.2 Understanding wider impacts

To make positive impacts on quality of life for those using our road network and those affected by it.

It is a big challenge for us and our suppliers to deliver positive outcomes to both road users and communities, the local and global environment. However, this is what we must do to have credibility as a socially responsible organisation. We must not be blind to the wider impacts of our work. We must not prioritise one group in society over others, for example delivering the perceived needs of road users to the exclusion of the needs of communities and the environment. Our activities in this measure are making reasonable progress. We have positive progress across seven of the activities and are adequate in two. One activity has no data yet and requires attention.

Understanding wider impacts



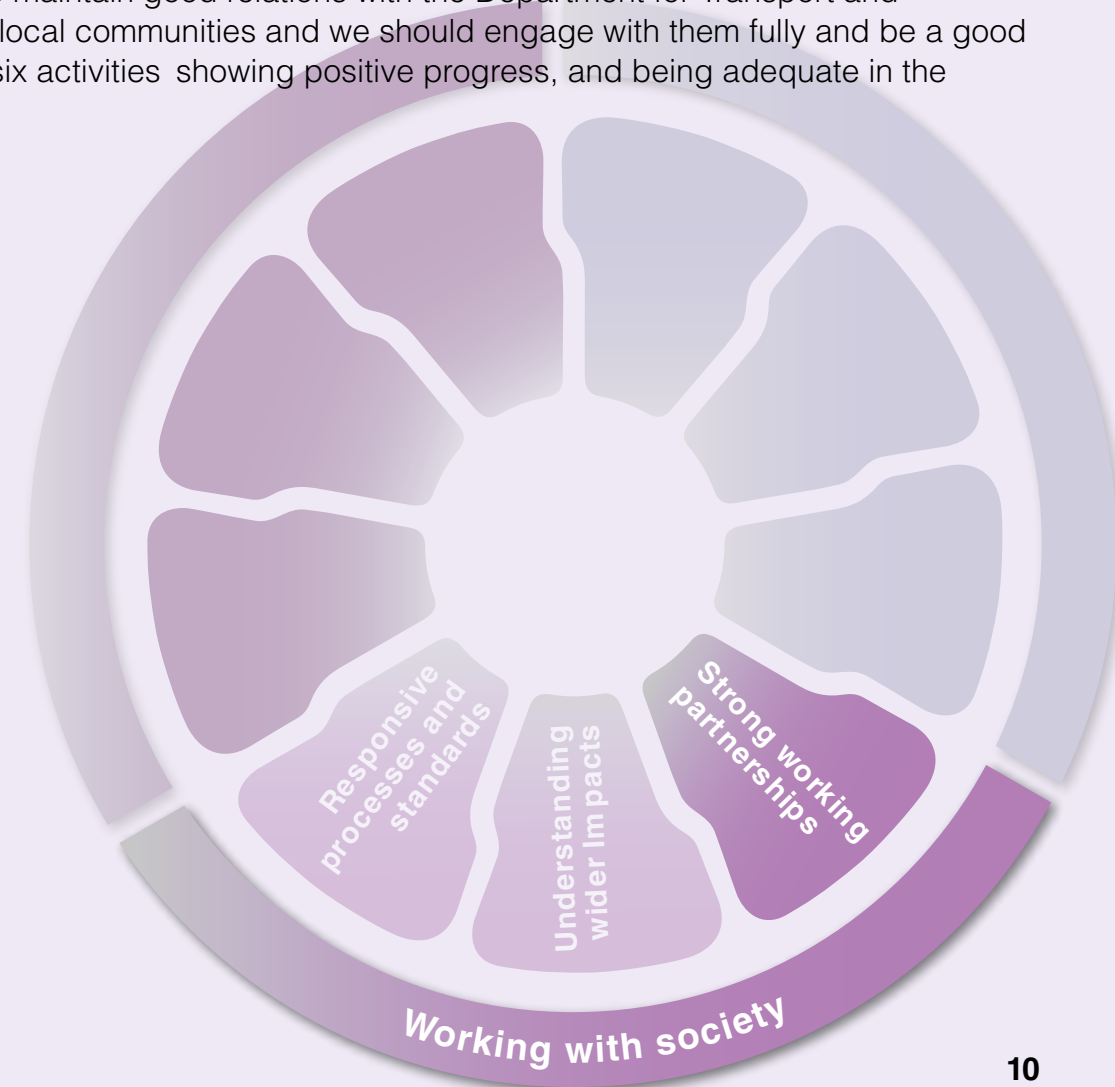
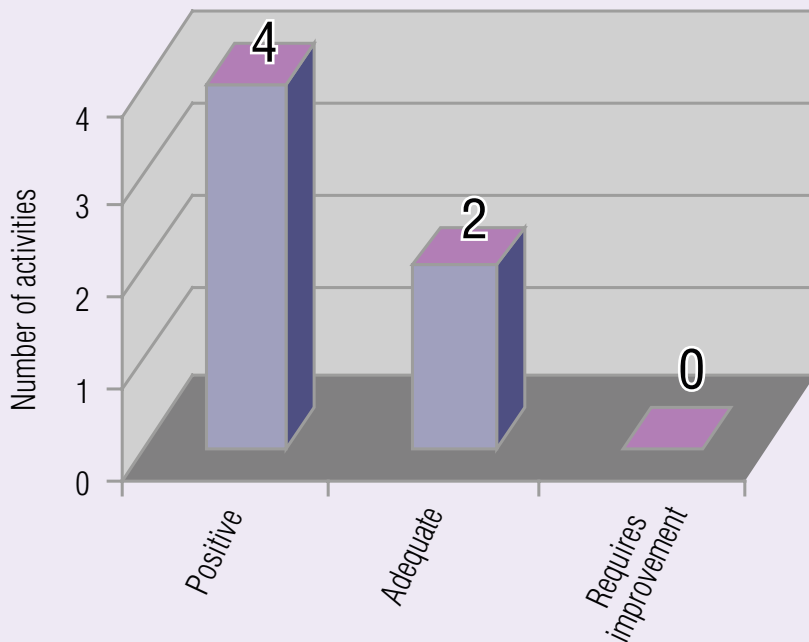
How are we doing with *working with society*?

2.2.3 Strong working partnerships

To agree common sustainability goals with major suppliers.

Strong working partnerships are vital to the Agency with over 90 per cent of our services being delivered by third parties. We need to work closely and to share common goals with our suppliers. We also need to maintain good relations with the Department for Transport and government more widely. Our road network has many interactions with local communities and we should engage with them fully and be a good neighbour. We are doing well against this measure with four out of the six activities showing positive progress, and being adequate in the other two.

Strong working partnerships



2.3

Highlights and concerns – *working with society*

Collaborative approaches to working with our supply chain are becoming more common and delivering benefits. A [strategic alignment tool](#) appears to be bearing fruit in terms of encouraging a shared understanding of our sustainability ambitions with our suppliers.

The understanding of how our work impacts on communities is growing and this should ultimately lead to improved decision making and design that helps to improve the quality of life in neighbouring communities. We are also progressing well on delivering against our statutory responsibilities for noise from our network. Against this we have made slower than expected progress on building our equality evidence base. This can be recovered during the life of both this plan and the Agency equality objectives.

We are moving forward positively on our ambitions to improve the safety of the road user.

3 Future Challenges

3.1 What are our future challenges?

The Agency is currently engaged on a major change programme seeking to position itself to respond to social and political change. We need to be a strong and flexible organisation able to respond quickly to both foreseen and unforeseen events. We always need to be mindful that whatever change means for our organisation we need to look outward as well as inward and look forward to proactively anticipate, plan for and respond to current and future challenges.

As well as dealing with tangible and immediate pressures on the road network, we need to ensure that our actions do not adversely affect the ability of future generations to enjoy a good quality of life. We also need to maintain awareness of changes in society and challenges such as climate change and resource scarcity.

“Roads are deeply embedded within the culture of the nation, and critical to the functioning of our society. Our world is changing and we must equip our road network to operate dynamically to adjust to whatever future lies ahead.”

“We will sustain the long term integrity and accessibility of our roads through effective management of a flexible, yet ageing asset.”

Highways Agency Strategic Plan 2010 - 15

This principle is underpinned by three performance aspects that all contribute to how we manage our approach to future challenges:

1. Innovation

Make innovation integral to everything we do in search of sustainable solutions

2. Continuous improvements

Continuously improve the economic, environmental and social outcomes that our services deliver

3. Adapting for change

Ensure our road network and building estate are resilient to environmental and societal changes.

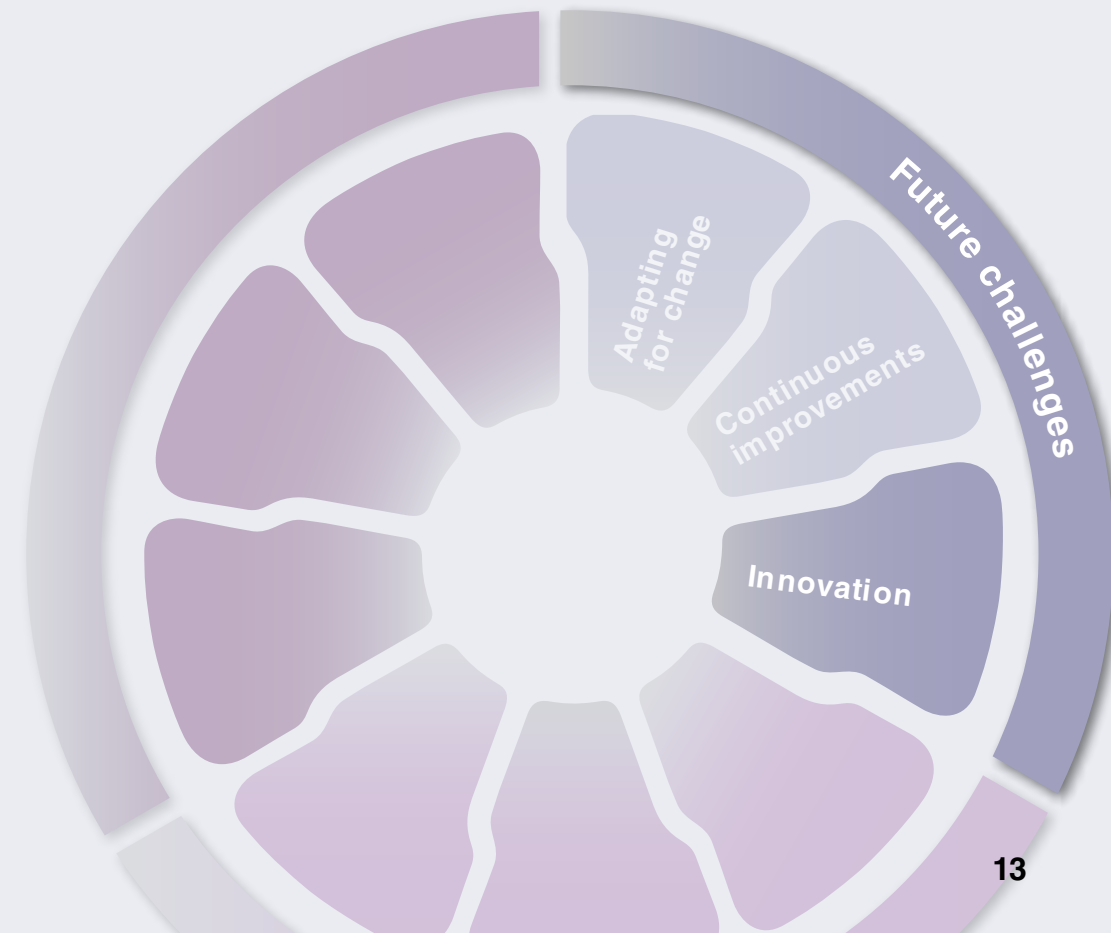
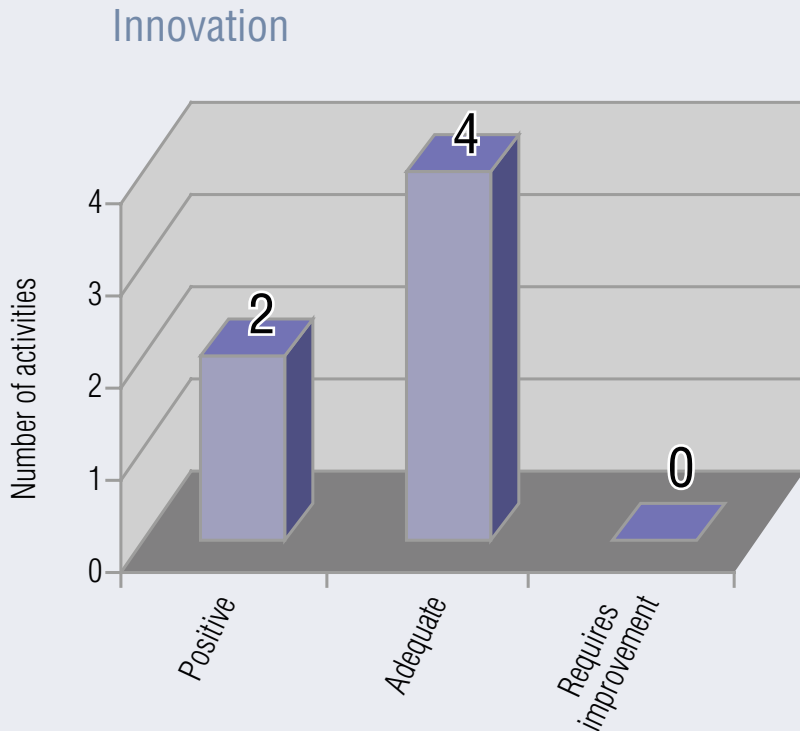


3.2 How are we doing with our *future challenges*?

3.2.1 Innovation

To make innovation integral to everything we do in search of sustainable solutions.

It is important for us to act as a catalyst for innovation across our sector. We have been successful in this over the years, and increasingly the focus has been on innovative and sustainable solutions. Partnering with and encouraging our suppliers to innovate to bring more sustainable solutions forward is a key part of what we need to do. Gaining a better understanding of the wider environment in which we operate and the challenges and opportunities for better delivery of our services is a key benefit of our research activity. Specifically, we have made positive progress against two measures in our plan under this theme, with four more showing adequate progress and a further two not having been reviewed at this time.



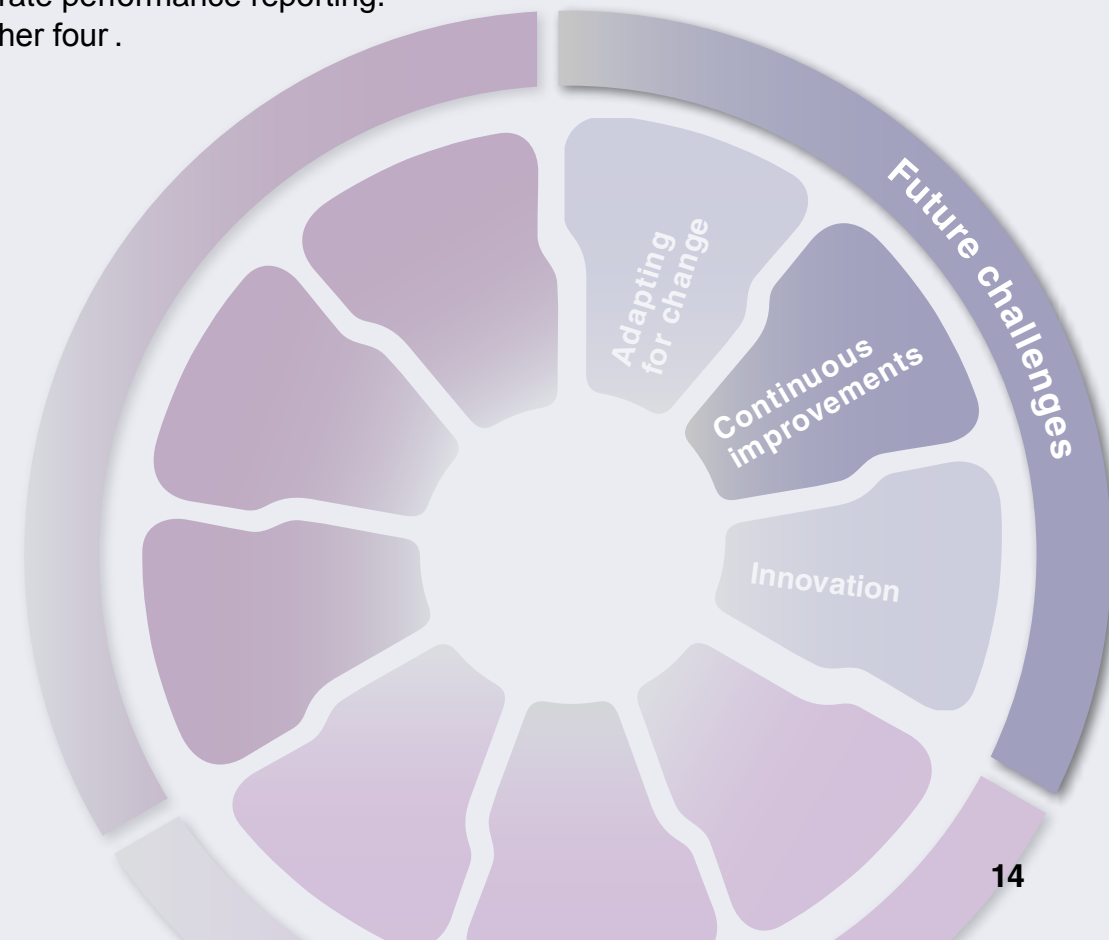
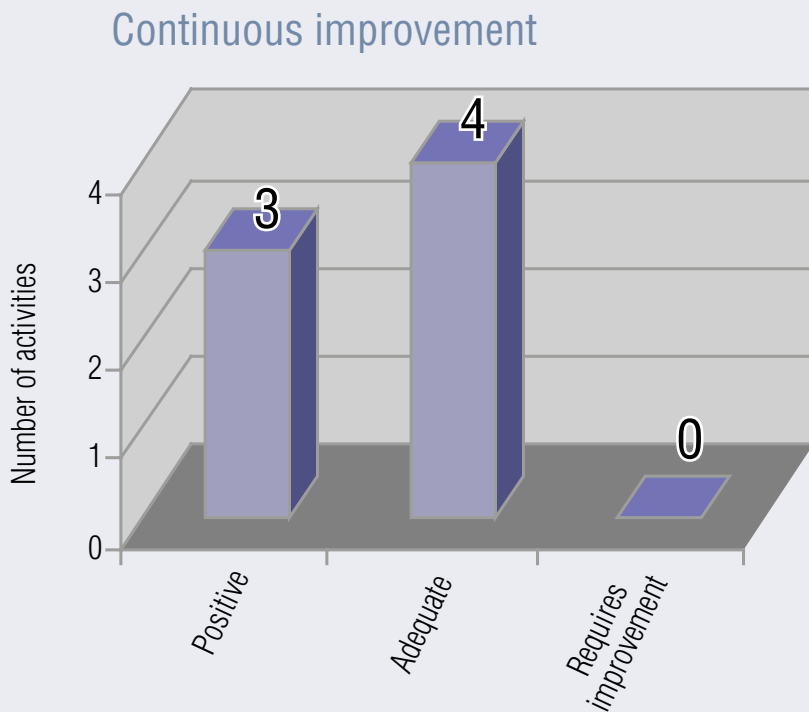
How are we doing with our *future challenges*?

3.2.2 Continuous improvement

To continuously improve the economic, environmental and social outcomes that our services deliver.

The importance of a culture of continuous improvement is well established in business as being critical to maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation in the face of external challenges. Continuous improvement is also a core principle in [Lean](#). In terms of sustainability the concept is the same. We need to continuously improve in order to eliminate negative impacts of our work on society, and the wider environment and to sustain our business in the longer term. A culture of continuous improvement will also strengthen our response to the ever increasing global sustainability trends that could pose a threat to delivery of our services.

We should be pleased with the progress we are making but also be mindful that we are only taking small incremental steps towards a sustainable future. A debate needs to be had on whether this is sufficient or whether it will leave us vulnerable to being overtaken by events. We are taking measurable steps forward as demonstrated through our corporate performance reporting. Progress against three measures is positive and adequate against the other four .



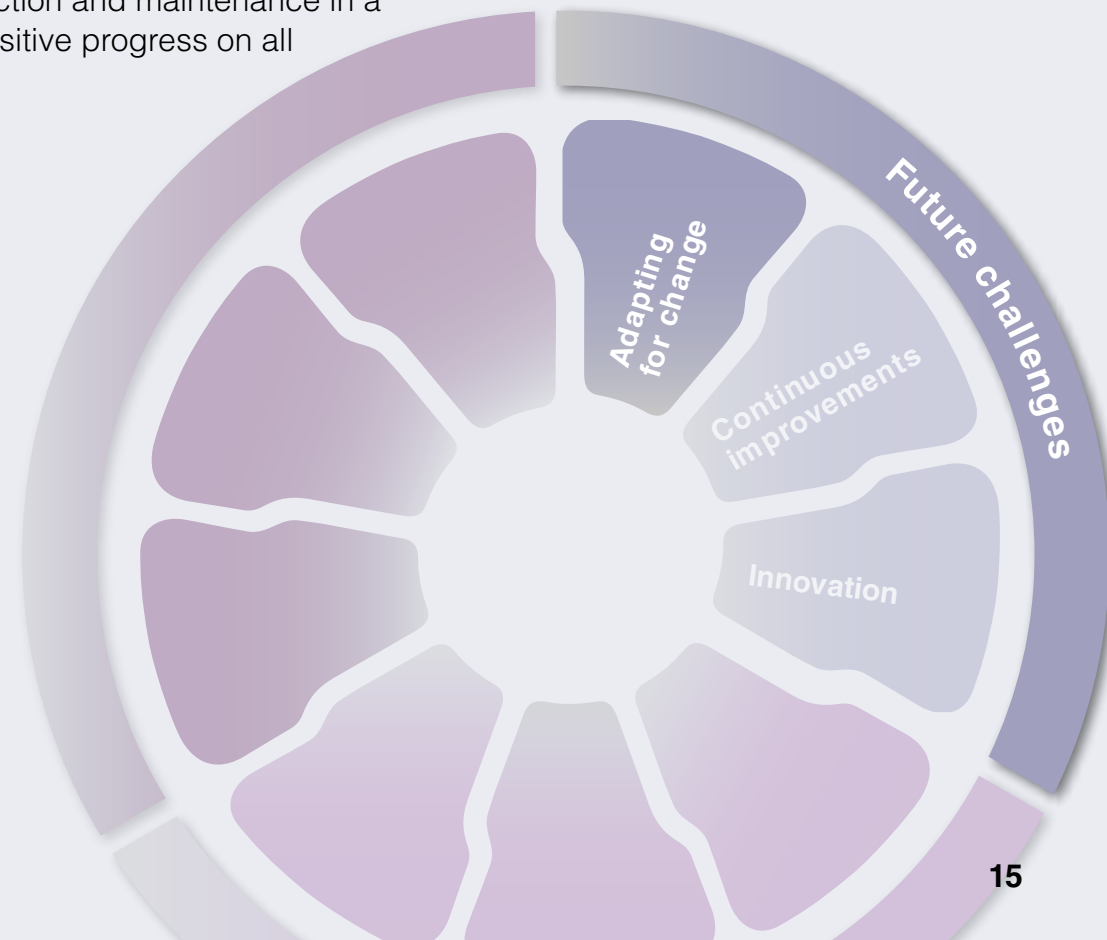
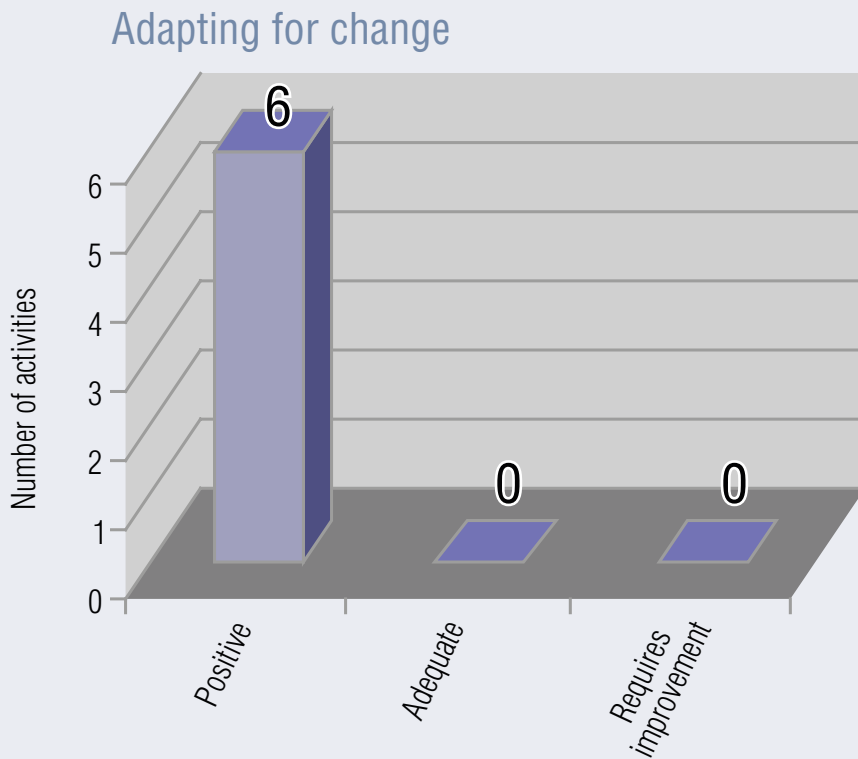
How are we doing with our *future challenges*?

3.2.3 Adapting for change

To ensure our network and building estate are resilient to environmental and societal changes.

It is important for us to look forward and to sharpen our awareness of the changing world around us. Our change programme is a vehicle to put us in a good place to respond to new demands placed on us. Alongside this we have been proactively looking at issues that could impact on the conduct of our business in the future.

We therefore have work ongoing to build on our climate change risk assessment, identifying priorities for action and appropriate adaptation measures that will be required to lower risks to our economy, environment and society. We have identified resource pressures as a potential threat to our operations and have work ongoing to understand the true nature of the challenges we face. We are focusing on water stress and how we may avoid this becoming a threat to our ability to deliver our services. Other work is gaining a better understanding of material [criticality](#) issues and how these may shape the way we approach design, construction and maintenance in a future world of constrained resources. We are currently able to report positive progress on all six measures under this heading.



3.3

Highlights and concerns – our future challenges

Over the first two years of the plan the Agency has been heavily engaged in positioning to manage future challenges. Most notable in this period is the work towards a climate change adaptation plan for the strategic road network. This has involved contributions from a range of stakeholders both within the Agency and from outside and will be a major step in making our road network resilient to the predicted future effects of climate change.

Effort has been around responding to political and organisational pressures which points towards a need to change the way we do things. This time of change presents opportunities to be bolder in our response to the greater external economic and environmental challenges that bear down on all organisations. Within the parameters set for this plan we have made good progress. More recent events point towards this organisation facing the future with a greater sense of direction and purpose while:

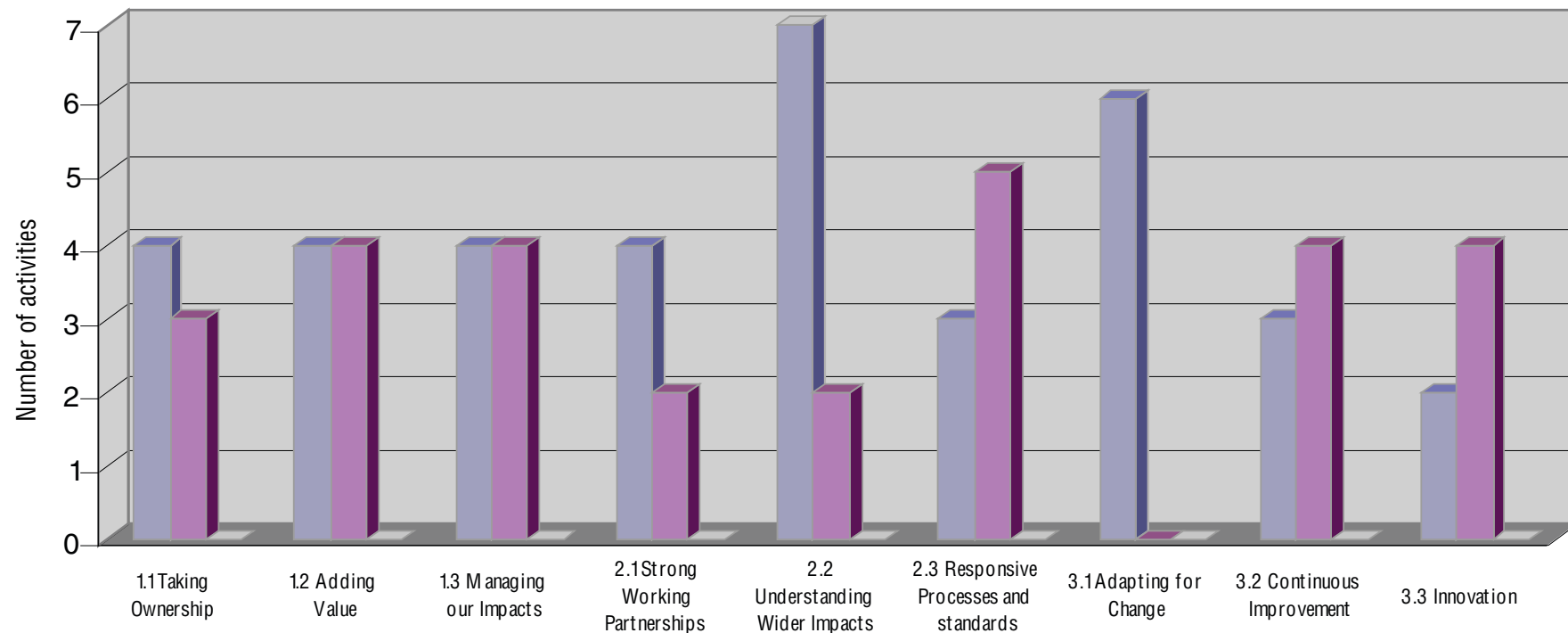
- understanding our dependence on resources
- being clear we need the consent of communities to operate
- respecting the benefits our environment brings to us and respecting its limits.

Conclusion

Over the two years of the sustainable development plan we have made very good progress towards embedding sustainability into our day to day operations. This has been achieved against a backdrop of tight budgets and uncertainty on the future status of our organisation. However, the Agency has decided to position itself strongly to respond to changes in the future, by instigating a change programme.

It will be important that in developing an improved sense of direction and collective spirit, which the change programme hopes to generate, we maintain sight of our wider responsibilities to support a prosperous society and a resilient natural environment.

Status of all nine performance aspects that incorporate all 65 activities
as at March 2014



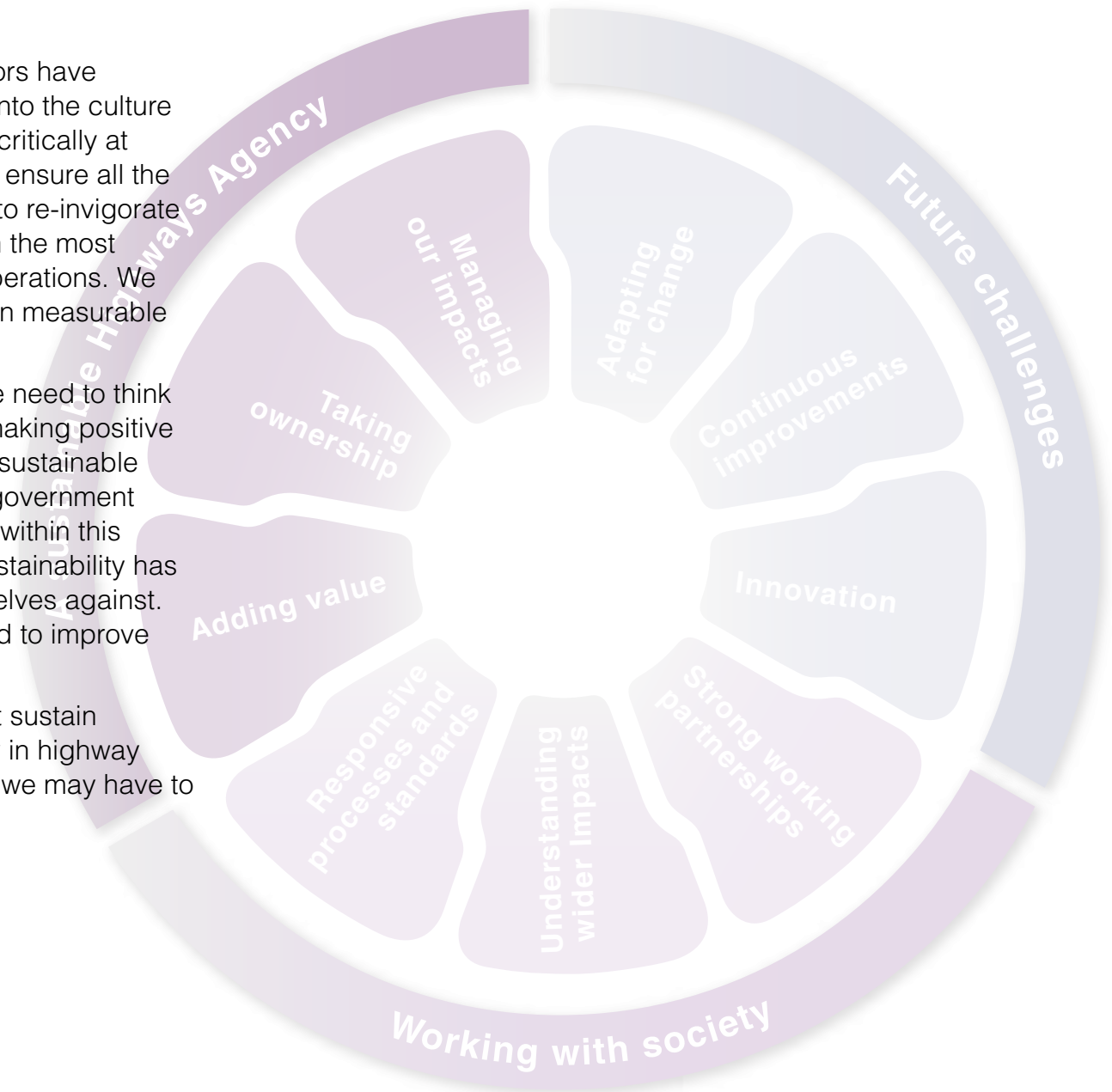
■ Positive	4	4	4	4	7	3	6	3	2
■ Adequate	3	4	4	2	2	5	0	4	4
■ Requires improvement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Forward view

This sustainable development plan and its predecessors have established a firm basis for embedding sustainability into the culture of the Agency. Over the next year we will have to look critically at the extent to which a real difference is being made. To ensure all the good work of recent years is not undone we will need to re-invigorate the message of sustainability. We will need to focus on the most significant areas that are impacted by the Agency's operations. We need to establish challenging goals and strive to obtain measurable benefits for society in whatever work we do.

Having completed two years of the three year plan, we need to think about what comes after this so that we can continue making positive contributions to the nation's future prosperity in a truly sustainable way, and in consideration of the Agency becoming a government owned company in spring 2015. A project embedded within this plan to establish how well we provide leadership in sustainability has already completed, providing criteria to measure ourselves against. This will give us the tools to understand where we need to improve and therefore provide a basis for future plans.

To summarise we are making good progress and must sustain the ambition to be at the leading edge of sustainability in highway provision. To meet the challenges the future will bring, we may have to be bold, innovative and creative.



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