



Department
for Transport

Roads Reform Programme Evaluation

An overarching monitoring and evaluation framework

March 2015

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Evaluating Roads Reform

Aims of this framework

- 1.1 This document sets out overarching plans for how the Roads Reform Programme will be evaluated. These plans have been developed based on independent recommendations provided by Risk Solutions (Appendix A) to the Department for Transport (DfT). Risk Solutions' recommended evaluation approach has been reviewed and refined by DfT, the Highways Agency, the Office of Rail Regulation and Passenger Focus¹. The high-level evaluation priorities, set out below, have been agreed amongst these organisations.
- 1.2 This framework has been established to ensure that appropriate and timely evidence is collected to assess whether the reforms are on track to deliver their anticipated benefits. The evidence provided within this evaluation will be used to assess how well Roads Reform is working and to inform future decision making (e.g. in the development of future Road Investment Strategies).
- 1.3 This framework, along with Appendix A, will form the basis for a more detailed evaluation design that will be established later in 2015. It will be used to ensure that this draws upon (and does not duplicate) existing data collection and reporting plans, generated as part of the audit, assurance and management of the Roads Reform Programme (e.g. the Road Investment Strategy Performance Specification²). Additional evaluation activity will only be conducted where there are important evidence gaps.
- 1.4 The first section of the document provides a brief overview of the Roads Reform Programme and is followed by a discussion of the approach to evaluation planning so far. The next section outlines the agreed evaluation framework including the evaluation themes and some examples of topics that will likely be explored within these themes. Lastly the document discusses the next steps that will be taken to progress the design and delivery of the evaluation.

Roads Reform Policy Background

- 1.5 *The Road Investment Strategy (RIS)* sets out a vision for a modern Strategic Road Network that supports England for generations to come³.

¹ Highways Agency will be transformed into Highways England in April 2015 and Passenger Focus is changing its name to Transport Focus on 30 March 2015.

² DfT and HA, 2014, Road Investment Strategy: performance specification
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-investment-strategy-performance-specification>

³ DfT, December 2014, Road Investment Strategy: Strategic Visions, Available from:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/383145/dft-ris-strategic-vision.pdf

To help achieve this vision, changes to the way the Strategic Road Network is managed and run are occurring⁴, by:

- Establishing new, long-term strategic planning and funding of the network through the first Road Investment Strategy
- Transforming the Highways Agency into a government-owned Strategic Highways Company (Highways England), able to operate more flexibly and efficiently and develop into a world-leading road operator.
- Putting in place a robust system of governance for this company, ensuring that Ministers set the strategic direction for the network, giving the company the autonomy to run the network on a day-to-day basis, while ensuring it can be held to account for its performance and continues to run the network in the public interest.
- Setting up an independent Watchdog and Monitor, to represent the interests of road users, and to monitor the performance and efficiency of the company.
- Introducing legislation to underpin these reforms, creating the legal framework for the reforms and providing a strong foundation that puts highways investment on a stable footing similar to other sectors.

Evaluation themes

1.6 Four broad themes have been identified for evaluation. These are:

- The Road Investment Strategy (RIS);
- The governance and organisational development of Highways England;
- The effectiveness of the Monitor and Watchdog; and
- The long-term impacts of Roads Reform.

The Road Investment Strategy

1.7 The evaluation will include an assessment of whether the RIS has led to investment in the Strategic Road Network that delivers better value for money compared to the previous investment structure. This will likely include exploring the following questions:

- How effective was the process of developing the second RIS and did it take into account the lessons learnt from setting up the first RIS?
- Are all elements of the first RIS fit for purpose? Are there any aspects that could be improved?
- What effect has the RIS (and the ring-fencing of funds) had upon Highways England's contract negotiations with suppliers, compared with previous Highways Agency practice?

⁴ DfT, December 2014, Transforming Our Strategic Roads, Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/roads-reform-transforming-our-strategic-roads-summary>

- Has the provision of longer-term and stable funding increased the efficiency of investment in the SRN?
- What effects have the 10 per cent annual budget flexibility and the longer-term overall funding certainty had on the efficiency of delivering programmes of work, value for money or other outcomes?

Highways England Governance and Organisational Development

1.8 The evaluation will assess whether the reformed processes and governance structures have enabled Highways England to operate in a more flexible and efficient manner. This will likely include exploring the following questions:

- Has the governance framework provided Highways England with an appropriate level of incentives, flexibility and accountability? What has been the operational impact of these changes?
- Has the effectiveness of Highways England's cooperation and engagement with stakeholders, road users and the supply chain significantly improved?
- Have organisational development changes led to a shift within the culture of Highways England, for example, towards increased levels of commercial awareness? Has this cultural shift resulted in changes in the operations of Highways England?
- What have been the effects of Highways England's increased flexibilities in staff incentivisation and recruitment (for example upon the skills and capability of the work force)?
- Has there been a step change in the quality of design, innovation and standards to which the Strategic Road Network is developed?

The Effectiveness of the Monitor and Watchdog

1.9 The evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the Watchdog and Monitor's structures, assurance processes and monitoring activities. This will likely include exploring the following questions:

- Are the structure and powers afforded to the Monitor and Watchdog fit for purpose?
- What effect is the independent challenge of the Watchdog and Monitor having upon the performance of Highways England?
- Are the Monitor's requests for data from Highways England (and Highways England's responses) proportionate?
- Are the Monitor and Watchdog effectively delivering their remits?

The Long-term impacts of Roads Reform

1.10 The evaluation will also assess the long-term impacts of Roads Reform. This will likely include exploring the following questions:

- What level of efficiency and value for money improvements have been delivered by Roads Reform?

- How has the Roads Reform programme affected the performance of Highways England?
- Has the satisfaction of Strategic Road Network users increased?
- Have there been any unintended consequences that have resulted from Roads Reform?

Next Steps

- 1.11** Having agreed the high-level monitoring and evaluation framework outlined above, DfT, Highways England, Transport Focus and the Office of Rail Regulation will work collaboratively over the coming months to form more detailed plans for how each of the evaluation themes will be assessed, building on Risk Solutions' recommendations.
- 1.12** Under this collaboration a lot of the evidence for the evaluation can be drawn from existing data collection and reporting plans (e.g. the Road Investment Strategy performance specification⁵). This will avoid duplication and minimise any burdens emanating from the evaluation. Additional monitoring and evaluation activity will only be commissioned where needed (i.e. where there are important gaps in evidence). Careful consideration will be given to deciding which aspects of the evaluation might need to be conducted by an independent evaluator to ensure impartiality.
- 1.13** The most pressing priorities will be ensuring that suitable baseline data are collected and developing detailed methods for the evaluation. Much of the work, however, will be carried out over a number of years given that many of the changes that have resulted from Roads Reform will emerge gradually.
- 1.14** More detailed evaluation plans, which will include descriptions of how the evaluation themes will be assessed, will be developed later in 2015. The coverage of the Roads Reform evaluation might change once these more detailed plans develop.

⁵ DfT and HA, 2014, Road investment strategy: performance specifications
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-investment-strategy-performance-specification>