

RAC Response to the National Infrastructure Commission Consultation

ABOUT THE RAC

With more than eight million members, the RAC is the oldest and one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. As such, it is committed to making driving easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for all road users.

The RAC, which employs more than 1,500 patrols, provides roadside assistance across the entire UK road network and as a result has significant insight into how the country's road networks are managed and maintained.

The RAC is separate from the RAC Foundation which is a transport policy and research organisation which explores the economic, mobility, safety and environmental issues relating to roads and their users.

The RAC website can be found at www.rac.co.uk

RESPONSE SUMMARY

The RAC welcomes the role of the NIC as a new, independent body which will look broadly at long-term infrastructure needs and provide impartial advice to ministers and Parliament.

The RAC's response to this consultation is based upon its experience and knowledge on road policy and will focus its response on sections 1 and 2.

RESPONSE

The RAC welcomes the National Infrastructure Commission's role in providing impartial advice on long term issues such as inter-connectivity and improving the transport infrastructure network.

Section 1 – Connecting Northern Cities

1. To what extent are weaknesses in transport connectivity holding back northern city regions (specifically in terms of jobs, enterprise creation and growth, and housing)?

The RAC believes the poor state of local roads (both in the north of England and across the whole of the UK) can heavily impact upon all of the areas mentioned in the question. The vast majority of journeys begin and end on local roads, whether or not the on-going journey is by road, rail or by air. The state of local roads is now the biggest concern for motorists, according to the 2015 RAC Report on Motoring. Our figures show that for 10% of drivers the state of local roads is now their number one concern, while a further 20% listing it as a top four issue. Half of motorists (50%) say the condition of roads in their area has deteriorated over the course of the past year. Transport spending priorities reflect these concerns: 30% say local road maintenance is their top priority for government transport investment (higher than any other spending priority), and indeed 45% of motorists say they would pay higher motoring taxes if the revenue raised was ring-fenced for road maintenance.

The Government's own estimates suggest that in order to get local roads in England back to an acceptable standard, it would require a 1-off investment of £8.6bn. Independent forecasts for the Asphalt Industry Alliance suggests the sum required is closer to £12bn. The cost to businesses through damage to suspension and steering of fleet vehicles has been estimated to be around

£215m¹. Such estimations are likely to have a wider impact on business and enterprise growth. The RAC estimated that in 2013, the cost to motorists was £100m².

For this reason, the RAC believes that the National Infrastructure Commission should look carefully at the role that fit-for-purpose local roads can play within the wider infrastructure debate. Improving the strategic road network and connecting cities with new roads, whilst vital, will count for little if motorists and businesses continue to suffer costly repairs and disruption when using the local road network. Whilst we understand that local roads are primarily the responsibility of local authorities, we call upon the Commission to look further into how better quality local roads can support wider infrastructure projects.

2. What cost-effective infrastructure investments in city-to-city connectivity could address these weaknesses? We are interested in all modes of transport.

For the reasons highlighted above, the RAC believes it is vitally important that upgrading local roads forms part of the debate of addressing city-to-city connectivity. We strongly urge the Commission to look into this in both northern cities, and the wider United Kingdom.

3. Which city-to-city corridor(s) should be the priority for early phases of investment?

The RAC has no specific comment to make on this question.

4. What are the key international connectivity needs likely to be in the next 20-30 years in the north of England (with a focus on ports and airports)? What is the most effective way to meet these needs, and what constraints on delivery are anticipated?

The RAC has no specific comment to make on this question.

5. What form of governance would most effectively deliver transformative infrastructure in the north, how should this be funded and by whom, including appropriate local contributions?

In relation to local roads, it is right that local authorities continue to have the primary responsibility for local road maintenance. However, local authorities have far more prescriptive legal obligations in the provision of other services such as education and social services. As a consequence, local road maintenance commands a relatively low priority even though motorists rank local roads as second only to education when it comes to prioritising local authority budgets. The 2015 RAC Report on Motoring demonstrates this, ranking education investment first at 46%, with local road investment second at 18%. There is a role, therefore for central Government to establish a ring-fenced source of funding for development and maintenance of local roads in a similar way to which they will hypothecate Vehicle Excise Duty to establish a Road Fund for the development and maintenance of the Strategic Road Network.

¹ <http://www.fleetnews.co.uk/news/2013/3/4/potholes-costing-fleets-millions/46357/>

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-25736223>

We should welcome any actions by the Commission to look at how better quality local roads can play a role within the wider infrastructure framework.

Section 2 – London’s transport Infrastructure

- 1. What are the major economic and social challenges facing London and its commuter hinterland over the next two to three decades?**

For motorists in London, local road maintenance is important. According to the 2015 RAC Report on Motoring, 30% of London motorists in the capital say their roads have deteriorated since 2014. Whilst this is only half the rate (59%) reported among drivers who live in villages or rural areas, it is never the less a significant percentage. It is unclear whether this is indicative that the condition of local roads in London is better than in more rural areas, or whether it is a reflection that Londoners generally have better access to other forms of public transport and so are less dependent on local roads.

- 2. What are the strategic options for future investment in large-scale transport infrastructure improvements in London – on road, rail and underground – including, but not limited to Crossrail 2?**

The RAC continues to believe that the road infrastructure will continue to play a major role in personal and public transport and in the delivery of goods and services. It is therefore essential that London’s local roads infrastructure is maintained to high standards and evolves to support ultra-low carbon road transport.

The Commission may wish to consider whether future revenue streams, such as that from the London Ultra Low Emission Zone, should be ring-fenced to further develop the infrastructure for ultra-low carbon vehicles, such as charging points for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles and in the longer term, a hydrogen distribute network to support the refuelling of Hydrogen Fuel-cell vehicles.

- 3. What opportunities are there to increase the benefits and reduce the costs of the proposed Crossrail 2 scheme?**

The RAC is not in a position to answer this question.

- 4. What are the options for the funding, financing and delivery of large-scale transport infrastructure improvements in London, including Crossrail 2?**

The RAC is not in a position to answer this question.

- 5. How have major metropolitan areas in other countries responded to similar challenges and priorities? Are there any lessons to be learned and applied in London?**

The RAC is not in a position to comment on major metropolitan areas in other countries.



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