



Our ref: CRS733,095
Your ref:

Via email

[REDACTED]
Highways England
Bridge House
1 Walnut Tree Close
Guildford
GU1 4LZ

[REDACTED]
15 February 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed our search for the information, which you requested on 16 January.

We have responded to each of your questions below.

(1) Why is the Conservative government's private company, Highways England, ripping-off the media/press/journalists with a much more expensive than normal 0844 telephone number instead of using 01, 02 or 03 normal rate telephone numbers ?

We are not ripping anyone off. The service charge for our number is 5p per minute from a BT Landline and is not dependent on geographical location. The service charge from mobile phones is subject to callers' service providers and payment plans. By way of comparison, local area codes can cost up to 9p per minute from a BT landline.

(2) Who financially gains from the premium telephone bill payers have to pay to access a government function via the 0844 number ?

Highways England does not financially gain from the use of the 0844 number. We have a contract with the supplier to provide us with the number and the administration system.

(3) Where are the 0844 premium beneficiary's details on Highways England's web site?

Highways England does not benefit from the 0844 number.

(4) What plans has Highways England to behave more professionally, reasonably and proportionately by using normal rate telephone numbers (01, 02 & 03) rather than premium rate numbers that financially benefit anonymous entities ?

Highways England always behaves professionally, reasonably and proportionally. We are a government-owned company which operates a busy and seamless 24 hour press office 365 days a year so that journalists and other members of the media from across the country are able to make contact with us at any time. This includes the option to contact a duty press officer out of office hours (overnight and at weekends).

In May 2012 as an executive agency of the Department of Transport, we introduced a single point of contact for media wishing to contact us by telephone – 0844 693 1884 – for the following reasons:

- any media wishing to contact us would have one, central contact that could direct them to any of our press officers in hours or the duty press officer out of hours. This reduced any complication and possibility, for example, of an enquiry out of office hours not being answered.
- the telephony administration system that sits behind this number gives us greater, more reliable control of the phone system and allows us to remotely change the call divert to the duty press officer in advance and at any time. This is important when managing calls during periods of high demand and the person answering may change at short notice over a 24 hour period, due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances.
- all callers would be charged at a standard rate (our previously used 0207 number could have cost more to call for those outside of London). Further, we were in the process of relocating our London office and as such would have been unable to use the former 0207 telephone number.

Highways England is in the process of transitioning from a regional telephone system to a single company-wide 0300 telephony system. As part of this transition, we are looking at the different options with our telephony provider to provide the service the press office requires.

(5) To whom at the Department of Transport can one complain about Highways England "highway robbery"?

If you wish to complain to the Department for Transport you can email them at Dftcomplaints@dft.qsi.gov.uk, write to 'Complaints Team, Department for Transport, D/04, Ashdown House, Sedlescombe Road North, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex, TN37 7GA' or call 0300 330 3000. More information on their complaints policy can be found online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/about/complaints-procedure>.

If you are unhappy with the way we have handled your request you may ask for an internal review. Our internal review process is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/highways-england/about/complaints-procedure>

If you require a print copy, please phone the Information Line on 0300 123 5000; or e-mail info@highwaysengland.co.uk. You should contact me if you wish to complain.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote reference number CRS733,095 in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

