



Department
for Transport

Draft Road Investment Strategy 3



August 2025

Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR



© Crown copyright 2025

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit

<https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3> or contact,
The National Archives at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/contact-us.

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is also available on our website at
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport

Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	6
The Process for Setting RIS3	6
Timetable and Procedure	7
Vision	8
Network performance to meet customer needs	10
A technology enabled and enabling network	13
Managing and planning for the future	14
Transport Focus Recommendations	15
Delivering the Road Investment Strategy	16
Performance Specification	16
Financial resources available	17
Integrated National Transport Strategy	18
Investment Plan	19
Enhancements	19
Inward Investment Projects	20
Smart Motorways	20
Operations, Maintenance and Renewals	22
Next steps	24

Foreword



In July 2024, when this Government came to office, we committed to deliver the biggest overhaul to transport in a generation.

A good quality road network is at the heart of our mission-driven approach to rebuilding Britain as part of the Government's Plan for Change. By supporting the kickstarting of economic growth through high-quality transport infrastructure, we can ensure that everyone, across all regions, is better off. And it is our Strategic Road Network (SRN) of motorways and trunk roads that does the most to keep people and goods moving.

Road travel is the backbone of our transport system, connecting people, communities, and industries. Our motorways and trunk roads are the economic arteries of the country, which are essential to the delivery of a more productive economy. In turn, this results in economic growth and better living standards for people in every part of the country. But too often, we see delays, bottlenecks, and deteriorating infrastructure that stifle progress. Today, with the publication of the draft third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3), I am announcing a plan that commits us to changing that.

The third Road Investment Strategy will form a core component of the government's new ten-year Infrastructure Strategy, which sets out a long-term vision for nationally significant infrastructure that supports sustainable growth, connectivity, and resilience. Within this framework, published in June 2025, the government expects National Highways to play a central role; not only as the operator of the Strategic Road Network, but as a key delivery partner contributing to broader national objectives.

RIS3 will also align with the government's environmental goals, supporting economic growth, national resilience, and environmental sustainability over the long term. It is essential that the road sector plays its part in the goal of decarbonising the economy as well as being resilient to the effects of a changing climate.

Our transport infrastructure must serve everyone. By investing in the SRN across the country, we will reduce regional inequalities, ensuring that all parts of the UK benefit from faster, safer, and more reliable road travel.

The transport sector faces the competing opportunities and pressures of making the road system deliver its benefits in a decarbonised world, whilst supporting economic growth. The publication of, and delivering on, the Transport Decarbonisation Plan and National Highways' Net Zero Plan shows that the road sector can play its part in the goal of decarbonising the whole economy.

We will continue to ensure that our roads remain amongst the safest in the world – helping drivers not just to be safe, but crucially, to feel safe and confident when driving.

Our objectives for RIS3 will be a continuation of the work begun in the first two road periods. Safety, customer service and delivery will remain the cornerstones of the way the SRN is managed. RIS3 will also build on work started in RIS2 to ensure that through a long term focus on maintenance and renewals, the network remains safe and fit for the future.

The Rt. Hon. Heidi Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Transport

Introduction

The third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3) will apply to the third Road Period (RP3) covering the five years from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2031. This follows a [1-year Interim Settlement](#) covering the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. The five-year funding settlements offered by Roads Reform¹ have provided stability and allowed a renewed and long-term focus on customer satisfaction and better outcomes for users of England's motorways and trunk A roads (the Strategic Road Network).

The Process for Setting RIS3

The statutory procedure for setting RIS3 began on 18 May 2023, with the publication² of:

- National Highways' Initial Report and its proposals for the future of the Strategic Road Network, Connecting the Country; and
- The Department's consultation on the Initial Report, Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads.

Building on this work, the draft RIS is the government's statement of what it wishes National Highways to deliver, and the outcomes sought for the SRN, together with confirming the resources available. It is informed by responses to the consultation and further engagement with key stakeholders undertaken following the 2024 general election.

The consultation revealed that respondents placed the highest importance on improving road safety and environmental outcomes. Many participants supported greater focus on maintaining and renewing the existing network rather than making large-scale enhancements. There was also a strong emphasis on reducing carbon emissions from both road users and construction activity, and integrating future development of the Strategic Road Network with local transport plans.

The draft RIS also takes account of government missions and objectives. It incorporates Transport Focus's recommendations in light of its insights into road user priorities as detailed on page 18.³ Collaborative efforts with our key partners such as Transport Focus, National Highways, and the Office of Rail and Road have ensured that the voices of drivers and road users are reflected in the strategic objectives. By addressing critical areas such as safety, network performance, environmental outcomes, and the integration of new

¹ The 2014/15 Roads Reform included major changes to the management and operation of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) including the setting up of Highways England (now National Highways) as a Government Company, introducing the Road Investment Strategy process, and creating the independent watchdog and monitor roles, all of which was included in the Infrastructure Act 2015. The aim was to improve road users' experience, provide value for money for taxpayers, and support economic growth via better road connections and faster, more reliable journeys.

² [These documents can be found through the consultation website at: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/shaping-the-future-of-englands-strategic-roads](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/shaping-the-future-of-englands-strategic-roads)

³ [Putting road users at the heart of the Road Investment Strategy for 2025-30](#)

technologies, RIS3 will aim to deliver a more efficient, sustainable, and user-centric road network that meets the evolving needs of all road users.

Alongside the draft RIS, we are publishing the *Summary of Responses* to the consultation on *Shaping the Future of England's Strategic Roads (2023)*.

Timetable and Procedure

The process for setting a RIS is set out in the Infrastructure Act 2015. As well as the draft RIS the following steps are required:

- National Highways must produce a draft Strategic Business Plan (draft SBP), indicating whether it believes the Government's objectives can be delivered within the resources available.
- The ORR must undertake an efficiency review National Highways' draft Strategic Business Plan, to confirm the proposals in the Plan are challenging and deliverable.

Final versions of both documents will be published alongside or shortly after the final RIS3 itself.

The Secretary of State must provide a date before which these documents are returned. These dates are set out as follows:

- Draft Strategic Business Plan: 1 September 2025
- ORR Efficiency Review: 30 November 2025

This timescale does not constrain further development of proposals in line with the steps set out in National Highways' licence. Prior to the publication of this document, the Department has been working closely with National Highways to allow them to develop the draft Strategic Business Plan, and with ORR to support planning of the Efficiency Review.

We expect to publish the final RIS3 no later than March 2026.

Vision

The Government wants the SRN to be a safe, well-maintained and well-managed network which supports economic growth.

Overarching objectives for the SRN during the RIS3 period were published in *Planning Ahead for the Strategic Road Network* in 2021, and are that it should help to:

- Grow the economy
- Improve safety for all
- Have a level of network performance that meets customers' needs
- Be a technology-enabled and enabling network
- Be a resilient network that is planned and managed for the long-term
- Deliver improved environmental outcomes

While the high-level objectives of RIS3 build on the foundations laid in RIS1 and RIS2, the country has experienced a series of unprecedented challenges since the publication of RIS2. These include the wide-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily transformed travel patterns, and global events such as Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, which have intensified economic pressures and placed additional strain on public finances.

RIS3 reflects this changing landscape. It has a greater focus than ever before on the maintenance and renewal of the network, reflecting both the feedback from responses to the consultation and the importance placed on this in the Government's Infrastructure Strategy.⁴ It responds to the state of the infrastructure that we inherited, the fiscal constraints we are working under and capacity in the supply chain. It is designed as an adaptive, forward-looking strategy - one that evolves in response to shifting national priorities, economic realities, and user needs.

Growing the economy

Boosting economic growth and promoting wealth creation for all is vital to ensure we raise living standards across the United Kingdom by spreading opportunity equally, and funding high-quality services that the UK population needs. That is why kickstarting the economy is the Government's number one mission to rebuild Britain; and promoting regional equality is a strategic aim for the RIS.

The SRN plays a critical role in building a stronger economy, raising living standards and productivity across the country. In 2023, one third of van miles and over two-thirds of lorry miles in England were driven on the SRN,⁵ despite the SRN making up only 2.4% of the

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-infrastructure-a-10-year-strategy>

⁵ [Department for Transport \(2023\): 'Road Traffic Estimates'](#)

overall road network by length. Based on National Highways' Value for Money Assessment, it is estimated that every £1 invested in the SRN returns over £2 to society.⁶ Overall, £409.7 billion of Gross Value Added (GVA) is generated by the sectors that rely on the network. This is projected to grow by 41% by 2050, to reach £578 billion, with employment in these sectors projected to grow by 5.5% to 8 million people.⁷

The SRN is a mature transport network, but one with a large and growing backlog of maintenance and renewal needs. Unless carefully planned and managed, a deteriorating road network will constrain economic growth, even before the challenges of meeting increased demand and responding to climate change. Road vehicle mileage is forecast to rise by approximately 10% by 2035 and climate change, and the related increase in frequency and severity of disruptive extreme weather events, will reduce the reliability of transport services if no action is taken to adapt to these changes.

The government recognises these challenges and, in line with the recommendation from the second National Infrastructure Assessment is prioritising maintenance and renewals within RIS3 and elsewhere.⁸ The increased renewals funding that will be provided through RIS3 will allow National Highways to improve the long-term condition of England's strategic road network, to counter the risk of slower, less reliable journey in the future. The RIS also has a key role to play in supporting the Government's housing goals. We are overhauling our housing planning system, as part of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#)⁹, to prioritise the needs of working people and communities, aiming to build 1.5 million new homes over the next five years through mandatory planning targets.¹⁰ Improved infrastructure will provide greater access to opportunities, drive socio-economic growth, and support the rapid delivery of much-needed housing capacity. Between 2018 and 2023, National Highways supported the development of 186,413 new homes and helped unlock land with the potential to deliver a further 392,000, working in partnership with Homes England.¹¹ This was achieved primarily through investment in infrastructure improvements around the Strategic Road Network, including new and improved junctions, enhancing local connectivity and access to enable housing delivery.

Construction itself is a vital part of the economy and paves the way for much needed housing. Housebuilding alone contributes £43.9 billion GVA each year, supporting 496,000 jobs.¹²

National Highways' investment supported approximately 64,000 jobs in the construction industry during RIS2,¹³ supporting the role of small and medium-sized businesses in road infrastructure design and delivery, employing people from a variety of backgrounds, working to break down barriers in a traditionally male-dominated engineering environment, and ensuring a focus on local hiring.

⁶ [Highways England: 'Economic analysis of the second road period' \(July 2020\)](#)

⁷ [National Highways – SRN Initial Report](#)

⁸ [National Infrastructure Commission: 'Second National Infrastructure Assessment' \(October 2023\)](#)

⁹ [National Planning Policy Framework - December 2024](#)

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/our-plan-to-build-more-homes>

¹¹ [Homes England Public Bodies Review 2023](#)

¹² <https://lichfields.uk/blog/2023/february/27/making-a-bad-situation-worse-the-impact-of-the-proposed-nppf-changes-on-housing-supply/>

¹³ [National Highways Net Zero Highways: Progress Report 2022-2023 - September 2023](#)



Improved connectivity across the nation provides greater access to opportunities and drives socio-economic growth and remains a key function of the SRN.

In 2022, over 80% of domestic freight was moved around the country by road, providing capacity that other modes cannot.¹⁴ We need reliable and resilient connectivity with our key maritime ports (including freeports), airports, and rail terminals to allow the UK to access global markets. The SRN serves the Channel Tunnel and, in England, 4 of the 5 busiest airports are directly served by the SRN and 7 of the 10 key ports have SRN links.¹⁵ The SRN plays a critical role in facilitating domestic and international trade. With more than three quarters of imports and exports leaving and arriving at international gateways by road, the SRN makes it easier to access customers and markets, while also helping to attract inward investment, boosting the economy.

Therefore, as we seek to build a stronger economy, tackle regional inequality and raise productivity across the country, the SRN will have a vital role in providing reliable, high capacity, resilient transport corridors. We will direct National Highways to focus on managing, maintaining, and renewing the network to ensure safe and reliable journeys on those corridors, in line with users' priorities for the network.

Network performance to meet customer needs

The SRN carries around one third of all motor vehicle traffic, providing important links to leisure and retail opportunities, as well as supporting business interactions.¹⁶ The primary purpose of the SRN is to support long distance journeys, taking strategic traffic out of towns and villages. To do this the SRN needs to provide fast, reliable movement of people and freight. The network must also operate alongside the local road network, providing suitable access and egress points, and enabling local traffic to mix safely with long distance traffic.

In 2023, 78% of all households had access to a car or a van.¹⁷ 67% of people use a car as their usual method of travel to work in England.¹⁸ Almost nine out of ten passenger miles are travelled on roads.¹⁹ RIS3 will deliver on the government's mission of breaking down barriers to opportunity by enabling access to career opportunities and facilitating accelerated

¹⁴ [Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2022 Freight](#)

¹⁵ [National Highways – SRN Initial Report](#)

¹⁶ [Department for Transport \(2023\): 'Road Traffic Estimates'](#)

¹⁷ [National Travel Survey 2023: Household car availability and trends in car trips](#)

¹⁸ [Transport Statistics Great Britain -Travel to work](#)

¹⁹ [Transport Statistics Great Britain Passenger Transport \(TSGB0101\)](#)

socio-economic growth, providing support and access to employment, training and education opportunities across the UK.



Meeting the needs of road users will be at the heart of RIS3 and will inform its strategic objectives. We know through Transport Focus research that users of the network want to see better management of roadworks, better management of unplanned delays such as collisions and breakdowns, and better information about that unplanned disruption. They also want to see good road surfaces, safer design and regular upkeep of the network. Road users also want more reliable, shorter, journey times.²⁰

The SRN supports public transport use and should not be a barrier for active travel. The Government will expect National Highways to work with all users to ensure the diverse needs of all road users are met. This includes supporting walking, wheeling and cycling, particularly where the SRN interacts with cycleways, footways, bridleways and local roads.

The SRN must also meet the specific needs of the freight and logistics sector, including in areas such as alleviating weight and height restrictions, improving driver facilities, and the timing of maintenance and renewals activities. Prioritising network performance on key freight routes, whilst also understanding the impact of freight on local road diversion routes, is essential to streamline operations and boost UK productivity.

²⁰ [Transport Focus - Putting Users at the Heart of Road Investment Strategy](#)

Improved environmental outcomes

Better environmental outcomes will be at the heart of RIS3, and the Government will require National Highways to deliver against the full range of environmental goals, as in previous RISs. RIS3 will be fully integrated with the Government's wider climate and environment objectives.

National Highways has already made considerable progress in ensuring environmental considerations are embedded in its everyday business activities. In line with the government's mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower, National Highways is committed to decarbonising its operations and that of its supply chain.. NH will support the Government's greener transport agenda to achieve Net Zero. It will invest in construction materials that accelerate the construction industry towards decarbonisation by 2040. It will also drive change within the construction industry by applying design principles that ensure materials can be reused or recycled at the end of their life.

National Highways will play its part in the low-carbon use of the road network to contribute to overall environmental ambitions. For example, National Highways will ensure its light fleet (including traffic officer vehicles) is 100% electric by 2030, roll out LED lighting across the network, and continue to deliver on its wider commitments set out in its Net Zero Carbon Plan.²¹

The Government will expect National Highways to meet, and where possible go beyond, all its legislative requirements where these relate to environmental obligations. This will be detailed in the performance indicators and capital investment plans that will be finalised in RIS3.

In particular, RIS3 will also require National Highways to reduce the environmental impact of roads in areas such as noise, air, and water pollution, including in the management of its own soft estates. Here the Government will expect National Highways to explore opportunities for restoring nature, increasing species abundance, connecting habitats and working at a landscape scale. This will be achieved through adhering to sustainable infrastructure approaches consistent with Green Infrastructure Principles,²² and by using the natural environment to capture carbon emissions.

Improving safety for all

Improving the safety of those who use the SRN, work on the SRN, and live alongside it is the Government's and National Highways' first priority. England's SRN is already one of the safest in the world: the UK ranks as 5th out of 38 countries for the lowest number of road fatalities per million population.²³ National Highways will maintain its ambitions to prevent incidents arising in the first place and to reduce the severity when they do occur. Further details on how the Government will improve road safety across all roads will be set out in the forthcoming Road Safety Strategy, expected later in 2025.

The Government will expect National Highways to prioritise specific routes where safety improvements for all road users are most pressing. This should be underpinned by the ambition that to achieve zero harm by 2050, meaning that nobody should be killed or

²¹ <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-work/environment/net-zero-highways/>

²² <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/Principles/GIPrinciples.aspx>

²³ [UK Government Statistics Reported Road Casualties](#)

seriously injured on the SRN by that date. The Government supports the adoption of a “safe systems” approach by National Highways and local highway authorities, to address not only the infrastructure elements directly within its control, but also through greater collaboration with the police, and other stakeholders. During RIS3 National Highways will further reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on the SRN. National Highways met their RIS1 target of a 40% reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured on the SRN, compared to a 2005 – 2009 baseline.²² Progress towards a stretch target of a 50% reduction for the RIS2 period has proved challenging.

National Highways should continue investing in technology to maintain and improve the reliability of the SRN, including upgrading ageing systems and exploring targeted innovation, such as data analytics and AI trials, where these support safety and operational efficiency. Alongside this, the Government will expect National Highways to maintain a focus on improving the wellbeing of communities located near the SRN. This involves addressing environmental and safety concerns such as litter, poor lighting, and the general condition of infrastructure, particularly in areas more vulnerable to neglect.

The Government also wants to see further efforts by National Highways to facilitate modal shift including Active Travel, so that more journeys can be made by cycling, walking and public transport. We will encourage National Highways to optimise the SRN to support a fully integrated national transport network by working with partners to ensure better connectivity between the SRN and local routes and enable seamless multi-modal travel. This could include improvements to signage, lighting, and accessible infrastructure in areas where the SRN intersects with other forms of travel such as wheeling, walking and cycling. By recognising the wider role the SRN plays in daily life, NH can help foster healthier, more connected communities while supporting wider objectives for accessibility, environmental improvement, and economic growth.

A technology enabled and enabling network

The technology context in which National Highways and the SRN operates is shifting and will continue to evolve. RIS3 will not be able to predict all the changes in the way in which the network is managed and used, but it should help prepare the ground for them, building in flexibility to respond to different dynamics as they emerge. We want to be ready to harness the rapidly developing possibilities of new technology to change the way people think about transport and how vehicles and physical infrastructure respond to that and each other. Technology will be a critical enabler for enhancing network performance in key areas such as safety, reliability, and resilience; transform road users’ experience; and reduce carbon emissions and drive efficiency across road use, maintenance, and construction. In doing so, technology will also enable more efficient road travel across all regions, using real-time information and integrating technology systems and data across the SRN.

Equally, National Highways should not be over-reliant on technology, for example drawing on insights from the use of cameras and stopped vehicle detection when considering driver safety and welfare.

Technology is already in extensive use daily to make sure the SRN runs well. The Government will expect National Highways during the RIS3 period to maintain and renew this technology so that it is fit for purpose and contributes to the smooth operation of the network.

Longer term, the use of technology and the connectivity of that technology should continue to improve the way the SRN is designed, built, operated, and used. Users of the SRN are likely to expect seamless connectivity throughout their journey, and transport technologies could play an important role towards other objectives including road safety, improving environmental outcomes, efficiency, and integration with other transport modes. All of this will support the government's missions of driving economic growth, breaking down barriers to opportunity and potentially reducing the burden on the NHS emergency services by improving response times, and creating a safer road network for all users. It is essential therefore that National Highways is willing to innovate and work with the wider supply chain, as well as other partners including Local Authorities, other transport modes, and the Devolved Governments. Key to this will be improving digital skills across the entire supply chain to fully leverage technological advancements.

Managing and planning for the future

To support economic growth and a more sustainable and resilient economy, it is crucial for the existing asset to be in a good condition, where asset performance is stable and predictable. National Highways is building on its positive work in improving its understanding of the condition of the SRN, its structures and associated equipment. The Government will expect National Highways to ensure these structures are systematically maintained and renewed so they continue to serve the country safely and reliably, long into the future. It will expect National Highways to follow an approach of proactive asset management and preventative maintenance during the RIS3 period to support the long-term management and planning of the network.

It is also essential that National Highways is well placed to deal with the resilience challenges that the network is facing. A significant part of the SRN is now 50 years or older, was designed to operate in a more benign climates and carry less traffic. As the asset ages, it will need increased maintenance and renewals to remain in a safe, serviceable condition to meet current and future needs.

Climate change is a key risk to transport infrastructure, and National Highways must increase the ability of the network to adapt to the projected changes, both in the short and long term. The main implications for the SRN are likely to be increased severe weather: more rainfall, high winds and extreme heat. This will impact road surfaces and embankments, and create operational challenges caused by a higher number of flooding and high-wind events. National Highways should therefore consider changes to the way in which the SRN is operated and maintained, to improve the resilience of the network and minimise impacts on overall performance and user experience.

RIS3 will be underpinned by the use of the Common Analytical Scenarios to cover economic, geographic, behavioural and technological uncertainties. These represent a wide range of scenarios, resulting in a range of different traffic demand growth projections. While all scenarios project traffic to grow above recent levels by 2060, the 'low economy' scenario projects limited traffic growth, with the distance driven reducing in the last 15 years of this scenario.

Transport Focus Recommendations

Grouped by the six strategic objectives set by the Department for Transport *in Planning Ahead*, Transport Focus has used its insights to recommend improvements that National Highways should deliver in RIS3, building on achievements from previous Road Investment Strategies.

1. Growing the economy

- Meeting the needs of freight logistics
- SRN 'network extent' – focusing on road users and their whole journey

2. Network performance to meet customer needs

- Better management of roadworks and unplanned delays
- Better information about roadworks happening in future
- Increased reliability of journey times, and shorter journey times

3. Improved environmental outcomes

- Ensuring that electric vehicles can be charged at services on the SRN
- Making bus and coach more attractive for journeys on the SRN
- Better, separate facilities for cyclists and pedestrians
- Park and ride as an alternative to driving all the way on the SRN

4. Improving safety for all

- Improved quality of road surfaces
- Safer design and upkeep
- Better behaved drivers
- Better roadside facilities

5. A technology-enabled and enabling network

- Better information for users

6. Managing and planning the SRN for the future

- Consideration of how National Highways need to be thinking ahead about new technology, particularly related to electric vehicles and information, and about how additional demand will be accommodated.

Delivering the Road Investment Strategy

Performance Specification

The performance specification sets out the required levels of performance that National Highways is expected to meet across its network with the available financial resources. It is a critical part of the Road Investment Strategy. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) independently monitors National Highways' progress in delivering performance outputs and outcomes and, ultimately, holds the company to account for the Secretary of State. The performance specification helps to ensure that National Highways focusses on what matters for road users, and wider objectives of environment, asset management and efficiency.

RIS3 will include a full suite of performance metrics under the same six outcome areas as RIS2, listed below. These will be further developed over the months ahead and will take account of the consultation responses.



Improving Safety for all: We want National Highways to strive to improve the safety of those that use, work on and are affected by the network. Like RIS1 and RIS2, we want to set a robust and ambitious safety target, ensuring that the network consistently maintains its status as one of the safest.



Fast and reliable journeys: Users highly value the ability to complete journeys faster and with greater reliability, which has considerable economic advantages. Prioritising improvements in this area should be a key focus of National Highways in RIS3. Additionally, we want to improve connectivity with other road networks to minimise disruptions for users, regardless of the road they choose to drive on.



A well maintained and resilient network: National Highways is the steward of a valuable public asset. A key part of the performance specification will be to keep the network in good condition and to develop the capability of the organisation as an asset manager.



Being environmentally responsible: We want to continue the progress made in RIS2 to improve the monitoring of environmental outcomes. For RIS3, this outcome area will include monitoring National Highways' actions to avoid damage to and improve the natural and historic environments, reduce carbon emissions, removing litter and support human health.



Meeting the needs of all users: Ensuring user satisfaction will remain a vital aspect of performance. Ongoing Transport Focus surveys will continue to provide a greater degree of insight. We are also keen to maintain an understanding of satisfaction among, and issues faced by specific customer groups.



Achieving efficient delivery: Ensuring RIS3 delivers best value for money for the taxpayer. Like RIS2, we will require National Highways to demonstrate that they are efficient and deliver schemes on time and to budget.

Financial resources available

The Statement of Funds Available (SoFA) sets out the public funds available to National Highways to deliver the objectives set out in RIS3. This funding covers the five-year period between 1 April 2026 and 31 March 2031, and is the total funding available to the company, covering both capital and resource expenditure.

Total RIS3 funding envelope	£24,983 million
-----------------------------	-----------------

The SoFA does not include funding for road infrastructure to support third-party projects, such as the Agratas electric car battery factory in Somerset, and the Universal Studios Theme Park in Bedfordshire, which are being progressed outside of the Road Investment Strategy framework, as part of wider cross-Government programmes with distinct governance and funding arrangements.

The final RIS strategy will define how this funding is split between capital and resource expenditure and outline the main categories of spend, including the schemes that will be delivered. Some funding within the RIS3 settlement for National Highways may in turn be passed to third parties (such as Local Authorities) for the purposes of delivering elements of RIS3 such as aspects of the operations or potentially scheme construction.

In RIS3, National Highways will also need to deliver further efficiencies. National Highways will work with ORR to deliver the maximum possible level of efficiency improvements consistent with achieving the requirements of the RIS and the wider licence. To achieve this, the ORR will ensure a strong and robust challenge on cost and deliverability, including through their Efficiency Review.

Integrated National Transport Strategy

The Integrated National Transport Strategy, which is currently in development, seeks to improve the strategic coordination of various transportation modes in England. RIS3 is being developed in parallel with the INTS and we will ensure coordination between both programmes to achieve long term goals such as decarbonisation and breaking barriers to opportunity.

Investment Plan

Since the first RIS was published in 2015, the Department for Transport and National Highways have built up a comprehensive picture of the condition of the Strategic Road Network and its future long term development needs. This has included changes in the way asset management is delivered. National Highways has brought much of the planning back in-house, as well as taking a systematic approach to surveying the condition of assets. The 5-year cycle of Routes Strategies has informed future improvements and enhancements to the network. Alongside this, independent advice has been provided by ORR in relation to asset management disciplines and by Transport Focus from a road user perspective. The investment plan for RIS3 builds on previous road periods and sets out the Government's expenditure priorities and expected outputs.

Enhancements

RIS3 will set out the Government's plans for the delivery of committed schemes, as well as for making progress on delivering the RIS pipeline and further enhancements where areas of the country are less well served by the SRN, or where significant congestion pinch points exist.

As noted above, RIS3 will have a far greater focus than earlier RISs on the maintenance and renewal of the existing network. Investment should also support integration with the local road network, as well as promoting modal choice for long distance journeys, and support active travel and public transport provision for shorter journeys.

RIS3 pipeline

As part of the RIS2 process, we developed a pipeline of projects to be considered for possible delivery in RIS3. The previous administration deferred construction of RIS pipeline schemes until after 2030. RIS3 will set out the pipeline of schemes that will continue to be considered for construction in RIS4 or late RIS3 if funding becomes available.

Strategic Studies

Strategic studies are a method to tackle problems that are too large to be resolved through one single project; or where the impacts of action are more complex or conditional and must be considered in ways that are not standard. A series of strategic studies established in both RIS1 and RIS2 have evolved according to changing priorities and matured in their approach, often now being developed in partnership with key stakeholders in each locality.

In identifying priority locations for further scheme development, strategic studies continue to serve as a useful mechanism to find opportunities to improve and link new infrastructure with substantial development opportunities and unlock issues at some of the most difficult points on the network.

Details on the findings from the strategic studies programme and work that is being taken forward will be set out in the final RIS.

Inward Investment Projects

The government continues to work with other government departments on Special Inward Investment Projects aimed at attracting new industries, foreign direct investment, fostering innovation, and creating high-quality jobs. Several cross-government initiatives, which also involve National Highways, are underway, supporting various large-scale development projects across the UK. These projects aim to bring significant economic benefits, including job creation, boosting local economies, and advancing key sectors such as clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and tourism.

These initiatives support the government's broader goals of economic growth, innovation, and sustainability, while positioning the UK as a global leader in key emerging industries.

Smart Motorways

In April 2023, it was announced that all plans for new smart motorways have been cancelled. This means that the 11 schemes already paused from the second Road Investment Strategy (2020-25) and the three RIS3 pipeline extra capacity schemes earmarked for construction during the third Road Investment Strategy (2026-31) have been removed from the Government's plans. The announcement also stated that while new stretches will not be converted, work on the M56 J6-8 and M6 J21a-26 would go ahead as planned given these schemes were already over three quarters constructed. Since this announcement, the M56 scheme has now fully opened. Work on M6 J21a - 26 is expected to be finished before the end of August 2025.



Although the construction of new smart motorways has been cancelled, substantial investment continues to improve the safety of the existing network. A significant aspect of this was the recent completion of additional Emergency Refuge Areas on the All Lane Running (ALR) smart motorways under the National Emergency Areas Retrofit (NEAR) programme. This programme was finished in March 2025, adding 151 new Emergency Areas across the ALR network, giving drivers more places to stop in an emergency. Alongside the NEAR programme, National Highways began a technology refresh programme in RIS2 to support better levels of roadside technology availability on Smart Motorways.

Operations, Maintenance and Renewals

National Highways manages 4,500 miles of road,²⁴ over 20,000 structures, 12 road tunnels, as well as drainage, earthworks, and technology equipment.²⁵ As the second largest asset owned by the Government - the SRN is valued at £156.1bn²⁶ - 43% of the RIS2 investment programme focussed on operating, maintaining, and renewing the existing network. As this asset continues to age, understanding the additional performance challenges and risks posed will require careful consideration by National Highways in relation to the operation of the network and its maintenance and renewals programme. The importance of this is supported by Transport Focus research which shows that road surface quality is users' top priority for improvement to SRN journeys.

Maintaining a safe and reliable road network depends on a well-funded, carefully coordinated maintenance programme, delivered through a balanced combination of operations, maintenance, and renewals (OMR) activities. These three elements are strongly interconnected. For instance, strategic investment in road surface renewals can reduce the need for reactive maintenance and unplanned operational responses such as road closures, contributing to smoother journeys and enhanced user experience. Targeted investment in renewals also supports long-term economic growth by improving the resilience and efficiency of the network. The plans for each OMR workstream are developed in coordination, ensuring that interdependencies are considered and aligned, with full details provided for each funding line in the final RIS.

Designated Funds and National Programmes

National Highways' responsibilities for the SRN go beyond the routine operation, maintenance, and enhancement of its infrastructure. To facilitate this, both RIS1 and RIS2 have included ring-fenced funds which are reserved for wider aspects of National Highways' activity. Since the beginning of RIS1, the designated funds have delivered improvements to the performance of the SRN, and reduced its impact on those affected by it, beyond 'Business as Usual'. Designated Funds promoted innovative practices and their deployment by National Highways delivered programmes of small-scale safety improvements that also support a well-functioning network; improved environmental outcomes; and improved inclusive and accessible facilities for those that walk, wheel and cycle around the network.

²⁴ <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/roads-we-manage/>

²⁵ [National Highways: 'Our Approach to Asset Management' \(May 2022\)](#)

²⁶ [Economic Role of National Highways - An Overview](#)

For instance, during RIS1, from the environment Designated Fund, National Highways contributed to reducing flood risk in 260 locations through their flood risk reduction schemes, such as on the A1 Leeming to Barton scheme, which not only mitigated flood risk but also improved drainage in the Brough Beck area, benefiting Catterick village. Meanwhile during RIS2, the environment and wellbeing Designated Fund addressed locations on the network that National Highways has identified as vulnerable to repeat flooding.



Another notable project that has been funded through Designated Funds is the National Highways' Suicide Prevention Strategy. This involves a multi-agency approach to saving lives by reducing the number of suicides and attempted suicides, whilst also supporting those people affected by these incidents on the SRN.²⁷

Stakeholders welcome the positive contributions that Designated Funds can make, particularly in relation to localised issues on or close to the existing network, and there are many examples where they have supported collaborative working with local government and civil society groups.

The Government therefore intends to continue to include Designated Funds in RIS3. As we are developing RIS3, we are re-examining the purpose and role of the Designated Funds. Many of the things which have historically been delivered through the funds have become legal commitments or otherwise 'Business as Usual' – one example is the legal requirement for all Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects seeking development consent from November 2025 to achieve biodiversity net gain. We expect these requirements to be funded by the scheme or another relevant funding line. We also want to ensure that funds remain focused on their core purpose: improving the experience for all users of the SRN, supporting innovation, and addressing the impacts of the SRN on neighbouring communities and the local, natural and historic environments, including dealing with legacy network issues. Investments must also demonstrate value for money for the taxpayer.

We are considering introducing new National Programmes to deliver defined outputs that support RIS objectives or commitments which are not within other programmes (for example, supporting specific programmes of activity around safety and environmental mitigation). These types of projects would have been funded via the Designated Funds in RIS1 and RIS2 but by making them distinct programmes we can more effectively monitor

²⁷ [National Highways' Suicide Prevention Strategy](#)

their delivery and outcomes. If these National Programmes were to feature in RIS3, their core purposes would remain the same as the Designated Funds, but they will provide a different delivery and funding model to complement the more flexible Designated Funds. If approved, the scope and size of Designated Funds will need to be reviewed as we define exactly what should be considered under each programme.

Next steps

Following the publication of the draft third Road Investment Strategy (dRIS), National Highways is required to produce a draft Strategic Business Plan (dSBP). The dSBP will set out how the company intends to deliver the Government's objectives within the funding envelope set out in the dRIS. The ORR will then review the draft plan to assess whether it is deliverable and sufficiently ambitious. These steps are part of the statutory process that will culminate in the publication of the final Road Investment Strategy by March 2026.