



Department
for Transport

Local Authority Major Schemes: Meta-Evaluation Report Summary

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What is this report about?

The Department for Transport (DfT) funds local transport infrastructure projects across England through interventions named Local Authority Major Schemes (LMS). Between 2008 and 2020, this involved delivering new roads, busways, tram lines, and transport hubs. This meta-evaluation report reviews how well these projects performed, their impacts, and what can be learned for future investment.

Why this report matters

This evaluation provides vital evidence for policymakers, local authorities, and the public. By understanding what worked and what did not, future transport investments can be better planned, more cost-effective, and deliver greater benefits for communities, the economy, and the environment.

Project delivery: timelines and costs

Delivery timelines

- From the 17 schemes reporting on delivery timelines:
- 47% of schemes were delivered on time or ahead of schedule.
- 20% had minor delays; 33% had significant delays (over 10% longer than planned).
- Average delay: 7 months (often due to issues such as bad weather, unexpected site conditions, and utility diversions).

Example: A multi-modal transport package (Worcester Integrated Transport) experienced delays in 3 out of 5 elements linked to planning process approvals, unforeseen underground structures, and bus operators' engagement. The overall package was, however, delivered to budget.

Costs

- From the 28 schemes reporting on scheme cost, 46% of schemes came in on or under budget; 54% reported being over budget.
- Larger projects were more likely to go over budget.
- On average, each scheme overspent by about 3%, and overall, the 28 schemes together overspent by about 6%.

Example: A large dual carriageway scheme (Norwich Northern Distributor Road) budgeted at £179m and finished at £205m due to unexpected design and construction

requirements, yet still offered very good value for money and met its objectives. A smaller roundabout improvement scheme (Elmbridge Transport) was completed under budget and on time due to effective project management and advanced traffic signal technology that reduced construction risks and delays.

Outcomes and impacts

Travel demand and behaviour

- 70% of schemes met or partially met travel demand goals.
- All highway schemes reduced traffic in targeted areas.
- Tram schemes saw increased use; bus schemes had mixed results.
- Evidence of a shift from car use to public transport, especially trams.
- Changes in walking and cycling were mixed.

Example: The Nottingham tram extension (Nottingham Express Transit Phase Two) led about 1 in 3 passengers to switch from driving, taking around 22 million vehicle kilometres a year off the roads and cutting congestion and emissions.

Travel time and reliability

- Most schemes improved journey times and reliability, especially public transport and multi-modal schemes.
- Highway schemes also improved, but to a lesser extent.

Example: A multi-modal scheme including road upgrades, pedestrian improvements, and upgraded bus facilities (Loughborough Town Centre Improvements) made peak hour journeys about one to two minutes faster on main routes and made travel times more consistent and reliable.

Local economic impacts

- Evidence from 32 reports shows that 69% of schemes reported positive local economic trends, including increases in business activity, employment, and housing.
- However, it is difficult to attribute changes solely to the transport schemes.

Example: A new dual carriageway (Heysham-M6 Link Road) unlocked land for development, resulting in notable growth in employment sites and housing, which contributed to regional regeneration by improving access to a local port and supporting freight operations.

Environmental impacts

- Most schemes did not fully assess carbon impacts. Of the ones that did, 11 showed an average drop of 850 tonnes of CO₂ each year, but results were mixed and 3 road projects caused more emissions.
- Nearly all schemes (13 out of 14) that measured air quality reported improvements.
- Noise impacts were mixed.
- Only a few schemes reported on biodiversity or landscape impacts.

Example: A single carriageway scheme (Bexhill-Hastings Link Road) contributed to a reduction in NO₂ and PM₁₀ concentrations along the A259 which helped lead to the withdrawal of the Hastings Air Quality Management Area, primarily due to improved traffic flow and reduced congestion on the corridor.

Safety

- 64% of schemes that looked at collision trends met their safety objectives, either fully or partly.
- Five years after opening, annual collisions were down by 37% across 14 schemes.

Example: A highway scheme (Todwick Crossroads Improvement) reduced collisions from an average of 9.1 per year pre-scheme to 3.3 per year post-scheme, with no fatalities recorded since the replacement of a signal-controlled junction with a roundabout and improved road layout.

Value for Money

- Only 10 schemes provided full post-opening value for money data.
- Most saw a modest drop in their benefit-cost ratio (BCR), although schemes still typically offered “very high” value for money.

Example: A multi-modal scheme (Stockport Town Centre Access) was expected to deliver £5.30 of benefits for every £1 spent, but after opening, the figure was estimated to be £4.70 – still offering very high value for money.

Lessons learned and recommendations

What worked well

- Early planning, phased delivery, and proactive risk management.

- Engaging stakeholders early improved project outcomes.
- Innovative construction and procurement saved time and money.

Example: The Stockport Town Centre Access scheme employed a utility coordinator to help speed up the works and allow multi-utility operations at the same time, which reduced disruption to travellers.

Challenges

- Inconsistent measurement and reporting.
- Many schemes did not measure all required impacts.
- Difficult to isolate the effects of transport schemes from other changes.

Recommendations

- Use standardised methods for data collection and reporting, following [DfT guidance](#).
- Prioritise more robust measurement of environmental impacts.
- Include counterfactual analysis where possible.