

John Larkinson
Chief Executive
Telephone
E-mail



Nick Harris
Acting Chief Executive

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Dear Nick

CEPA Report – Smart Motorways Stocktake Action Review

Today we have published the attached report from CEPA¹, which we commissioned to make recommendations to us about how we should monitor Highways England's performance in delivering the actions from the *Smart Motorways Stocktake and Action Plan*.

There is no doubt that Smart Motorways continue to remain high profile for Highways England and Government, and it remains important that road users have confidence in the measures Highways England is taking to improve safety and perceptions of safety.

Like all reports, CEPA's review is a snapshot in time. This is particularly relevant when considering Smart Motorways because the policy and practices continue to evolve in response to stakeholder concerns. The review undertaken for us by CEPA was carried out over an extended period of six months. We had intended for this report to be completed by March 2021 but added some additional scope looking at the operational resourcing of Smart Motorways. This meant that the fieldwork and report writing for sections two and three were completed and finalised before the *First year progress report* was published by Highways England. At this time some of the action plan commitments were changed, particularly the acceleration of Stopped Vehicle Detection (SVD) technology installation. Therefore, those sections of the report do not always reference the now revised completion dates.

When considering the recommendations from CEPA we have also been aware of the wider context in which Highways England has been operating over the past year. This is reflected in our conclusion, set out in our annual assessment, that Highways England has responded well to the unique challenges of the past year, and has

¹ Smart Motorways Stocktake Action Review, CEPA, July 2021, available [here](#) (under July 2021 consultants' reports).

achieved all its KPIs. Highways England also achieved its targets for operational performance the first Road Period (2015-20). While traffic levels may have been low, changes required to working practices, and the changed nature of incidents on the network, have meant that Highways England has needed to respond to maintain performance.

However, CEPA's report does raise a number of areas in which we require further evidence from Highways England to provide us with confidence that it will continue to achieve its KPIs and the commitments made in the *Action Plan*.

CHARM Rollout – ORR notes that the information included in the report was correct in February 2021, however your plans since then have changed and now, where automatic setting of 'report of obstruction' functionality exists, this will not be lost in the transition from COBS to CHARM. Risks still remain however, and in order for us to have confidence that these are being appropriately addressed we require you to provide ORR with a monthly report on the CHARM rollout to provide confidence that auto messaging, and other features, will be delivered in line with expectations. We note that your most recent plan has completion planned for summer 2022. The report is to include progress against plan, risks, issues, and the mitigating measures you are taking to address these, including any issues affecting operation of the Strategic Road Network on a day-to-day basis.

Resourcing – ORR acknowledges that within any business there is a vacancy factor, and staffing levels may be planned to a higher level than needed to account for attrition or absence. However, you do appear to be behind your own plan to grow your teams in some key posts identified by CEPA, particularly in the South East and East regions. While this has not resulted in a failure to achieve your KPIs we want to be confident that your commitments will continue to be met in the future, particularly ORR needs confidence that you have a deliverable plan to achieve the 10-minute response time set out in the *Stocktake Action Plan* where spacing between safe places to stop in an emergency are more than one mile apart; this is a more challenging target than was envisaged in the current Road Investment Strategy (RIS2). We note that the activation of Operation Brock recently has prevented you from achieving the 10-minute response time on the M25, M3, M20, and M23 at the end of July.

Therefore, in order for us to form a view on whether the issues and future risks identified by CEPA are being successfully mitigated by Highways England we require you to provide ORR with:

1. an assessment of the staffing levels required, at a disaggregated regional level, to meet the 10-minute response time set out in the action plan, and how Highways England's existing staffing levels compare to this assessment. This is to be provided to us by 8 September 2021;
2. a monthly report, at a disaggregated regional level, that shows performance against the 10-minute response time; and

3. a monthly report, at a disaggregated regional level, detailing traffic officer recruitment, absence, and attrition rates.

All monthly reports are to be provided no later than 10 working days after the end of the previous month and should focus on the key roles identified in CEPA's report (Traffic Officers, Traffic Officer Supervisors, ROC Operators, and ROC Supervisors). For example, data for August 2021 should be provided to ORR no later than 14 September 2021. ORR will require the data to be provided in xls. format with associated commentary from HE on performance against its plan.

We will carefully consider the other recommendations in the report for our monitoring of other areas of the *Action Plan*.

Yours sincerely

John Larkinson
Chief Executive