

DfT consultation on creation of a Major Road Network

Policy context

1. The Department for Transport has issued a consultation on proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network (MRN). This would include a network of the main locally managed roads to complement the Strategic Road Network (SRN) managed by Highways England. Roads included in the MRN will be able to access additional funding via a specific new funding stream.

Background

2. The Government sees a strong case for increasing investment on the most important roads currently managed by local authorities in order to support economic growth, unlock new housing and relieve traffic pressures on local communities. To do this it proposes to define a national network of such routes as the Major Road Network.
3. The Government intends to define the MRN on a consistent national basis. Roads included will be based on traffic levels and qualitative criteria including network coherence (ensuring sensible route continuity), linking of economic centres and its inter-relationship with the SRN.
4. A plan of an indicative MRN is provided in the document. Roads within Gateshead included on this are the A184 Felling By-pass, A184 Consett route/Askew Road, and the A167 south of the A1 through Birtley. At least one crossing of the Tyne is included, but it is not possible to determine from the plan whether this includes the Tyne Bridge, Redheugh Bridge, or both. The consultation emphasises this is an indicative network only, and that further engagement will be undertaken with local and regional bodies before it is finalised.
5. In order to deliver on the objectives the following core principles are proposed:
 - Increased certainty of funding;
 - A consistent network;
 - A co-ordinated investment programme;
 - Clear local, regional and national roles;
 - A focus on enhancement and major renewals;
 - Strengthening links with the Strategic Road Network.
6. It is anticipated roads within the MRN will remain under the control of local authorities. However the consultation is clear that proposed measures for

them should be developed on a collaborative basis to provide a co-ordinated approach to routes.

7. The following types of scheme are proposed to be eligible for funding:
 - By-passes;
 - Missing links between existing stretches of SRN/MRN;
 - Widening of existing roads;
 - Major structural renewals;
 - Major junction improvements;
 - Improved technology;
 - Packages of improvements, suggested as combined elements of safety, widening, junction improvements and new alignments.

8. The following types of scheme are specifically proposed for exclusion:
 - Schemes on roads not on the MRN, unless a compelling case could be made that there will be a significant positive impact on it;
 - Schemes wholly on the SRN, unless there is a clear regional need that would warrant consideration through national investment criteria;
 - Public transport schemes, unless they are part of wider interventions and their inclusion can be shown to support MRN objectives;
 - Non-specific local authority wide packages of improvements.

Implications

9. Definition of the MRN will provide a potential additional source of funding to allow the upgrading of some of the more major roads in Gateshead. Proposals will usually need to be prepared on a collaborative route basis, rather than by individual local authorities.

10. As part of their draft Strategic Transport Plan, Transport for the North (TfN) have identified a significantly more extensive MRN (developed through their Major Roads Report in mid-2017). As the MRN is essentially a sub-national tier of roads the definition and management of them should be handled by bodies such as TfN, where they exist.

Gateshead response

11. In principle definition of the MRN, with its recognition of the wider importance of major routes (and consequent commitment to additional funding), is to be welcomed. The consultation seeks responses on 16 specific questions, the proposed response to which is attached in the accompanying Annex.

Implications of recommended option

12. Resources:

a) **Financial implications** – the Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms that there are no specific financial implications arising from this consultation response. However, routes identified as part of the MRN may present an opportunity to bid for additional funding.

b) **Human Resources implications** – none.

c) **Property implications** – none.

13. **Risk management implications** – additional investment in roads forming part of the MRN will reduce the risk of under-funding in these routes posing a risk to safety or reliability.

14. **Equality and diversity implications** – none.

15. **Crime and disorder implications** – none.

16. **Health implications** – the proposals currently provide only limited possibilities for promoting active and healthy travel.

17. **Sustainability implications** – the proposals currently provide only limited possibilities for promoting more sustainable travel.

18. **Human rights implications** - none

19. **Area and ward implications** – wards through which the draft MRN routes pass include Birtley, Bridges, Dunston & Teams, Felling, Lamesley, Lobley Hill & Bensham, Pelaw & Heworth and Wardley & Leam Lane.

Major Road Network consultation – draft response

Core Principles

1. Do you agree with the proposed core principles for the MRN outlined in this document?

As a sub-national tier of roads, the definition of the MRN needs to be undertaken at an appropriate level. Where they exist, the primary responsibility for the definition and management of the MRN should lie with the relevant sub-national transport body.

The comment that the MRN will not adversely affect local highway maintenance funding is welcome, but should be extended to cover funding for local highway improvements. It would not be acceptable for improvements to the MRN to be at the expense of other roads. The need for improvements to roads not on the MRN will remain, and will sometimes be of equal if not greater priority to those on the MRN.

Defining the MRN

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the quantitative criteria outlined and their proposed application?

The quantitative criteria of traffic levels and the percentage of goods vehicles is a reasonable approach. However the criteria need to be transparent (no figures are supplied in respect of the indicative network shown in the consultation).

It is not clear why de-trunked roads should be automatically included. If such roads are of sufficient importance to warrant MRN status they should qualify on the basis of the wider criteria used in its definition.

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the qualitative criteria outlined and their application?

The qualitative criteria are supported.

4. Have both the quantitative and qualitative criteria proposed in the consultation document identified all sections of road you feel should be included in the MRN?

Additional links should be included as follows:

- A167 Durham Road, Gateshead (north of A1). This has high traffic levels (>20,000 vehicles per day in some places) and is a key alternative route to the A1 – during major road works on the A1 in 2009 increases in traffic flow in excess of 60% were observed;

- C324 Kingsway. This has traffic levels of up to 30,000 vehicles per day in some locations and again provides a key alternative to the A1. It also acts as the spine road to the Team Valley Trading Estate, one of the main economic centres on Tyneside employing some 20,000 people. This road is not currently part of the TfN proposals for the MRN but, given this consultation's emphasis on supporting the SRN, its inclusion should be considered;
- A1114 Handy Drive. This provides a major alternative route to the A1 linking to the regionally important development at the Metro Centre;
- Redheugh/Tyne bridges. The indicative network includes at least one of these major regional river crossings. The network should include both crossings in light of their very high traffic flows and strategic importance to the regional centre.

5. Have the quantitative or qualitative criteria proposed in the consultation identified sections of road you feel should not be included in the MRN?

No.

6. Do you agree with the proposal for how the MRN should be reviewed in future years?

The proposal for five yearly reviews is appropriate. However it may be necessary to allow any routes proposed for removal from the MRN at any time continued access to funding where schemes have already been identified as a priority.

Investment Planning

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the roles outlined for local, regional and national bodies?

Given the regional role of roads on the MRN a more prominent role for sub-national transport bodies (where they exist) in the process of defining and setting priorities for the MRN should be provided. This could include devolution of funding decisions through appropriate allocations to the areas covered.

8. What additional responsibilities, if any, should be included? Please state at which level these roles should be allocated.

See answer to question 7 above.

9. Do you agree with our proposals to agree regional groupings to support the investment planning of the MRN in areas where no sub-national transport bodies (STBs) exist?

Yes.

10. Are there any other factors, or evidence, that should be included within the scope of the Regional Evidence Bases?

No.

11. Do you agree with the role that has been outlined for Highways England?

Yes, albeit programme, analytical and cost estimate support should be channelled via sub-national transport bodies, where these exist.

Eligibility & Investment Assessment

12. Do you agree with the cost thresholds outlined?

A £20 million threshold appears to be significantly in excess of what is likely to be affordable through most other funding streams. A lower threshold, perhaps £10 million, would seem more appropriate.

13. Do you agree with the eligibility criteria outlined?

The eligibility criteria need to reflect better the more complex issues faced by local authorities in conurbations. These sections of the MRN are likely to be the most heavily trafficked and congested, face the most conflicts between competing demands, and be linked with other problems. This was a factor highlighted in the original work on the MRN by the Rees Jeffreys Fund but, other than packages, little attention is paid to it here.

There should be a more explicit link to other priorities, notably improving air quality. References to pedestrians and cyclists are particularly weak, and the exclusion of public transport schemes is arbitrary and unnecessary. In addition there should be scope for funding boulevard/urban design treatments necessary to integrate high volume roads within densely built up urban areas.

14. Do you agree with the investment assessment criteria outlined?

The proposed criteria are appropriate.

15. In addition to the eligibility and investment assessment criteria described what, if any, additional criteria should be included in the proposal? Please be as detailed as possible?

Impact on carbon emissions should also be included within the assessment.

The original Rees Jeffreys Fund work highlights the likelihood that pressures of increasing congestion will outstrip the ability of additional capacity and technology to counter these. Accordingly schemes should also be assessed against how they intend to manage demand for travel in the longer term.

Other Considerations

16. Is there anything further you would like added to the MRN proposals?

No.