

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE



Highways England has made great progress in our first road period (2015–20). We can be pleased with what we have achieved in this final year of RIS1, and we recognise and embrace the significant challenges to come in the next five-year road investment period and beyond.

## Looking back

Back in 2015, we were entrusted with £15.2 billion<sup>1</sup> by government to invest in England's strategic road network (SRN), which covers the country's motorways and major A-roads in England. We agreed eight key performance indicator (KPI) targets, and the budget included the delivery of 112 major enhancement schemes. It also covered investment through five ring-fenced (designated) funds to support work outside of traditional road investment, such as delivering cycle paths and improving the environment.

We have met most of our KPI targets, exceeding some but not quite meeting others. We have made our network safer, and reduced casualties in line with our ambitious targets to cut the number of people killed or seriously injured on our network by 40%.

Over the five years, we have stayed within our funding, delivering £1.4 billion of efficiencies and providing over £2.50 of public benefit for every £1 we spent on our major schemes. We have refined our original programme, cancelling or postponing schemes where the costs outweighed the benefits, which accounted for roughly 10% of our portfolio. We have completed, or are working on, nearly 70% of the other original schemes, and we will deliver the remaining schemes within the second road period (2020–25).

We have also focused on meeting our customers' needs. We have consistently exceeded our incident clearance and network availability targets, and found new, innovative ways

to improve customer service. This includes our implementation of 60mph speed limits through roadworks, where safe to do so, which won the public policy of the year award.

On balance, we are satisfied with our results. The SRN is now considered a key economic asset, with a well-established need for long-term investment to ensure the prosperity and wellbeing of our country. In the areas where we have not fully met our targets, we have clear plans to action for the second road period.

## Looking ahead

Our £27.4 billion of funding for the second road period will allow us to further improve the network for road users, the communities we impact, and the environment. Our new targets include reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on our network by 50%, against the 2005–09 baseline. Our ambition is to save customers over 20 million hours, currently lost in traffic congestion, and to provide £27 billion of benefit for road users and the economy through improving journey time, stimulating employment and supporting housing and business developments.

We are planning to open 52 schemes for traffic, deliver £2 billion of efficiencies and renew 1,100 miles of safety barriers. We will deliver an ever-stronger sustainability strategy in support of government's ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, and support up to 64,000 jobs in the construction industry.

We have worked closely with ministers, our colleagues at the Department for Transport (DfT), and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to ensure that our plans are robust. We are confident that we can meet our challenging targets, keeping safety, customer service and delivery as the imperatives that drive everything we do.

## In-year events

We have faced new challenges this year. Our smart motorway schemes were placed under public and media scrutiny during DfT's safety evidence stocktake. The stocktake was commissioned by the last government and continued by this one and ran from October 2019 to March 2020. The stocktake found that "overall, the evidence shows that in most ways,



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smart motorways are as safe as, or safer than, conventional motorways". It also said that some areas of individual risk and public concern should be addressed. The published report identified an 18-point action plan, and you can read about some of our key next steps on page 54 of our strategic report. We are determined to do all we can to make our roads as safe as possible, and will be taking forward the measures set out by DfT.

There was the unexpected outbreak of Covid-19 as we approached the end of our 2019–20 financial year. I am proud of how we responded to this challenge, and especially proud of our critical workers who enabled the safe travel of NHS and other emergency service workers, as well as the timely delivery of essential goods. We were able to meet all our in-year objectives and first road period commitments, while also supporting our staff and supply chain to move to new ways of working. You can read more about our initial response to the pandemic on page 56.

## 2019–20 highlights

One of our key successes in this financial year was our £1.3 billion A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon scheme. We completed the 12-mile bypass between Swavesey and Ellington in December 2019, a year ahead of schedule. The rest of the scheme is due to open for traffic in May 2020, eight months early and on budget<sup>2</sup>. This bodes well for the next major schemes in our pipeline, including the £850 million M4 smart motorway.

It also sets us up well for our other transformational schemes, such as the Lower Thames Crossing and A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down, which are both due to start in the second road period. You can read more about our delivery, across the first road period and in 2019–20, in our strategic performance review on pages 32 to 36.

In the second road period:

**52**  
schemes will be opened for traffic

**£2bn**  
of efficiencies will be achieved

**64,000**  
jobs in the construction industry will be sustained

<sup>2</sup> At the date of publication, in September 2020, the scheme was open for traffic, completing early in May as planned.  
<sup>3</sup> Subsequent to the preparation of this statement, Government announced that Dipesh Shah will be joining the company as the new permanent Chair with effect from 1 September 2020.

As we look to the future, we must recognise how far we have come as well as how much there is still to do. Our maturing approach to sustainability, for example, can be read about on pages 98 to 100. We need to demonstrate that we can meet government's commitment to zero carbon and within its committed timescales. We also need to exploit the full potential of the digital revolution, both in our activities, and in our communications with road users and stakeholders. Our commitment to supporting and developing a diverse, healthy and fulfilled workforce can be found on page 110. And more detail on our three imperatives is provided in this year's operational report on pages 76 to 95. **S**

## Thank you

I would like to thank everyone at Highways England for their passion and commitment to getting the country, and each other, home safe and well this year – and for the excellent examples of professionalism I am fortunate to witness every day. I also thank our Chairman, Colin Matthews, who stepped down at the end of April 2020. He has led the Board with commitment and vigour, and given immense service to Highways England. At present, we are anticipating an announcement by government on the appointment of our new permanent Chair, at which point we can look forward to working together as we move into this exciting new phase of our journey<sup>3</sup>.

Jim O'Sullivan  
Chief Executive



Jim O'Sullivan discussing our winter vehicle fleet at Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire