

REES JEFFREYS ROAD FUND

Major Roads for the Future

Core Proposition - Summary

May 2016

Who we are

The *Rees Jeffreys Road Fund* is a charity which supports education and research in transport. In autumn 2014, RJRF commissioned a two-year Study on *Major Roads for the Future*, to be carried out by David Quarmby and Phil Carey. The objective is to develop a long term vision through to 2040 for England's major road network, for its users, the communities it passes through and for the role it plays both nationally and in the regions. The Study is due to report in October 2016; for further information visit the study website www.futureroadsengland.org

Summary

This paper sets out the summary of our Core Proposition, focusing on the need for a consistent and coordinated regime for the strategic planning, governance and funding of England's major roads; and secondly, identifies the elements which make this regime, and the resulting Major Road Network itself, fully 'fit for purpose'.

- The 4,400 mile Strategic Road Network (SRN) managed by Highways England – critically important though it is - does not in our view comprise all the 'strategic' roads that matter in driving and supporting England's economy at national and regional levels.
- We have identified a further 3,600 miles of the more 'strategic' local authority roads which when put alongside the SRN constitute an integrated and balanced network of national and regional roads capable of supporting our regional economies across England. This is the 8,000 mile Major Road Network (MRN) (see the attached indicative map)– a more logical and objectively assessed set of roads providing the basis for consistent standards for the user, and supporting economic and spatial planning on a regional basis.
- The MRN will only fulfill its potential if the needs of its users are properly understood, and if its strategic planning and funding is carried out on a consistent and coordinated basis; this is challenging given the current gulf in the funding and planning regimes as between Highways England and local highway authorities.
- We do not envisage any changes in responsibilities as between local highway authorities and Highways England. However, the new governance arrangements for Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs)¹, formed by the voluntary coming together of groups of local authorities, provide an opportunity to bring their respective regimes closer together. We envisage the STB would adopt the MRN in their area as the 'natural' integrated network of national and regional roads, lead the strategic planning of this network in collaboration with Highways England, and ensure the needs of the MRN's users are met in a

¹ Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, Section 21

coherent way. Even where STBs are not created, the MRN as defined provides a focus for LEPs, local authorities and Highways England to collaborate on developing coordinated user-led long term plans for national and regional roads.

- As Combined Authorities (CAs) begin to designate Key Route Networks for their areas, we envisage the MRN will incorporate the most important roads from each KRN, alongside the SRN in that CA area. The focus of the MRN is on access into and across the CA area - the strategic connections with the hinterland, other city regions, ports and elsewhere on the national network.
- The creation of the National Road Fund (NRF) 'for strategic roads', based on hypothecated Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) from 2020, provides the opportunity to explore how far NRF funding might be applied also to the local authority elements of the MRN, as well as to the SRN.
- The MRN and how it is planned and managed need to be 'fit for purpose' to support regional and sub-regional economies, and to fulfil the reasonable expectations of its users and the communities it passes through. Our Study sets out the dimensions of 'fitness for purpose', including effective maintenance of the assets, management of safety, and making best use of capacity, as well as special considerations for major roads in urban areas.
- Much of what constitutes fitness-for-purpose of the MRN is already addressed, for its SRN components, through the combination of Highways England's own corporate strategies, by the licence and the performance targets monitored by ORR, and by the RIS determined by DfT. For the local authority parts of the MRN, fitness for purpose is in part addressed through codes of practice and guidance documents, and other policies.
- We are mapping our dimensions of fitness onto these existing arrangements for the SRN and for local roads. We consider how the responsibilities for delivering all this might be divided between the network operator and strategic bodies where they exist.